

NEW YORK IS ALMOST ALRIGHT?

The first in a series of
world-wide investigations on cities

URBAN AGE

UNDER- STANDING THE CITY

The Urban Age is an investigation into the nature of the modern city in six parts

Deyan Sudjic

New York is perhaps the most populous and certainly the most urban of America's cities. Such qualities are not universally seen as representing positive attributes in a country in which the traditional city is regarded with a certain degree of political and popular suspicion and which is continually elaborating new forms of exurbia.

Understanding New York's very particular nature, and its prospects is an essential part of coming to terms with the evolving nature of the contemporary city, as it faces up to the reality of the extraordinary size jump of the later years of the 20th century. Scores of cities now have populations far larger than entire European nations. A city with an effective population of 18 million people – now the size of both New York and London – is an entity with no historic precedent. If such a metropolitan area is to achieve the cohesion and the sense of identity that until now has been regarded as the fundamental essence of any successful city, then it must either learn from and build upon New York's experiences, or else find an alternative workable model.

As the first stage in a cumulative sequence of conferences organised by the Cities programme of the London School of Economics, and the Alfred Herrhausen Society for International Dialogue, to be held in six cities across four continents, Urban Age is exploring the deliberately provocative proposition that New York is almost all right. Through a mix of muddle and dynamism, New York is succeeding as a city. It continually attracts new people, and creates new jobs for them.

Despite everything else, it has proved itself as an urban machine with an impressive capacity to turn poor migrants into citizens with at least a foothold on the ladder to prosperity. By the standards of a Houston or a Los Angeles, it has done so with relative restraint in its use of land and natural resources. New York, at least in comparison with Houston or Phoenix is a city that has the possibility of bringing its consumption of fossil fuels used for transport under some kind of limit. It still has significant numbers of people who regularly walk to work.

It is a city that has begun to address years of under investment in its infrastructure, and to reclaim its marginalised neighbourhoods, even as it has had to face fiscal problems, a lack of affordable housing, and a middle class under increasing stress. A contrary view would be to see New York as relying on federal and state tax subsidies, overly dependent on an excessively narrow employment base, and facing the prospect of serious difficulties meeting the financial obligations of the bond issues made to fund a huge investment in transport infrastructure. Despite the much publicised turn around in its fortune of the last decade, it still lacks such basic urban infrastructure as a rapid transit link to its primary airport. New York may have more pedestrians than Dallas, but it is also more polluted, faces a famine of affordable housing, dead rats in its gutters, and may be in the midst of what is inevitably no more than a temporary lull between crime waves.

The conference will test both views of the proposition to explore the model of the relatively high density city embodied by New York, as the first step in a series of such investigations that will move to Shanghai and London in 2005, and then to Mexico City, Johannesburg and Berlin in 2006. Urban Age is based in the belief not just that these cities have things to learn from each other, but also from understanding themselves in the context of a wider appreciation of similar challenges and opportunities. Above all it is a response to

the belief that this is a moment for a reappraisal of the armoury, intellectual and practical, that we have for understanding and developing the future of all cities. Despite the complexities and nuances facing the city, the fundamental models for it are still encompassed by two paradigms; the high density versus the low density model.

New York's experiences offer lessons both for rapidly growing cities such as Shanghai, Mexico City and Johannesburg, some positive, others cautionary, as well as for cities with more similar characteristics such as London and Berlin.

Urban Age is a kind of comparative clinical testing process, exploring new techniques for diagnosis and treatment, across six cities, assessing their wider applicability. In New York, as in the other five cities the conference is undertaking a comparative analysis of key policy areas, from the legal and political underpinnings of city government, to the economics underlying employment issues, and the physical form of the city and the degree to which urbanism and architecture impact on it. By bringing together academic specialists with individuals concerned with the day-to-day shaping of urban policy, and the key actors in the field: political, financial, and professional, the Urban Age moves beyond research, to build an agenda for the emerging city.

London and New York are cities with striking parallels. When their metropolitan areas are taken into account, they have comparable populations, size, and economic base. Both are attracting newcomers drawn from an extraordinarily widespread range of countries. Both have in the past suffered from the loss of traditional industries associated with their roles as port cities. They have evolved analogous structures, at least as far as their business districts are concerned: London's West End office area parallels Midtown, the City is Wall Street, and Lower Manhattan is reflected in Canary Wharf.

The two cities have considered similar remedies for their difficulties, from new financial instruments for funding public transport, to various forms of tax incentives for housing and job creation, to road pricing and policing methods. It's an interplay that has produced a significant flow of key individuals between the two cities to take up senior roles in their implementation. And at the same time, New York and London have as many discontinuities. Their political systems are in fact very different. And in their ethos, there is the paradox of a New York supposedly governed by market forces, actually shaped by rent control to an extent that London with its supposedly more socialised system has never contemplated.

But a comparison of New York and London offers a rich potential source for the understanding of the impact of urban change, and policy and design upon it.

Urban Age is using four distinct themes as the focus for its explorations of the forces that drive the urban process to arrive at some sense of synthesis around the key issues facing the city. The aim is to relate policy and economic issues to the physical form of the city, equally critical concerns that are too often isolated from each other. This underpins the series of questions that Urban Age asks. They are posed in the context of New York, but of concern to all major cities, and by interrogating the fundamental issues of what it means to make a city, the hope is to bring fresh clarity in helping us make choices. Cities are the economic mechanisms that create the wealth that sustains their people. But do jobs build cities or is it cities that build jobs? In other words is it those urban qualities of a city that are within our power to change that are responsible

for attracting fresh investment that brings jobs. Or is it simply the creation of jobs that brings with it, all those other desirable urban qualities.

The public realm is the key aspect of contemporary life that is unique to the modern city where strangers can come together to share the experience of city life. But at a time of public fear of terror, how is it still possible to feel safe in the crowd?

The city may be a powerful machine for the transformation of the migrant poor into more affluent city dwellers. But to judge by the stress the middle class find themselves under, priced out of affordable housing, concerned by public education and health systems, the city must address the squeezed middle, especially in the field of housing. Then there is the issue of movement within the city. Commuting distances driven by the cost of housing, and an imbalance between mass transit systems and the private car are escalating. Finding ways of reducing journey times is a vital part of improving the quality of life in a city.

Each of these issues sparks off a whole group of contingent questions. And the issues that they raise are interrelated. They form the starting point for a dialogue that will move to Shanghai, and London, Mexico City, Johannesburg and Berlin to contribute to the production of a major statement about the nature of the contemporary city. This cannot be a prescriptive blueprint, advocating the low density garden city, or the high density alternative of the past. It must go beyond the tidy minded attempts of the past to zone cities by functions. Its form will depend on clarity about the definition of the city, and a pooled experience of its nature.

Deyan Sudjic is architectural editor of The Observer and co-chair of the Advisory Board of the Urban Age.



DO JOBS BUILD CITIES OR DO CITIES BUILD JOBS?

The role of work and the modern workplace

It is almost 20 years since William H Whyte in *City*, his study of the exodus of corporate headquarters from New York's downtown, suggested that a corporation that is tired of Manhattan is tired of life. Whyte plotted the movement of executive jobs from the city streets to isolated corporate campuses, in the 1960s and 1970s and he explored the worrying tendency of such companies to implode shortly afterwards.

He pointed to Union Carbide and American Can in particular as organisations that built themselves new corporate palaces that won architectural awards, but marked the last stage of their existence as independent entities. The exurban location, he suggested, had the effect of isolating corporations from the face-to-face economy of the city, and thus further weakened companies that were already vulnerable. And he made a comparison with those companies that stayed behind and flourished, or even those who did make the move, but left behind a vestigial front office in the city that grew more and more crowded as those executives who could, made the decision to stay. He could equally well have been talking about London, or Paris which experienced precisely the same movements as corporations attempted to capitalise on the land value of their buildings.

Whyte was describing an economy, and a city landscape that has changed beyond recognition in many significant aspects. But he posed a critical question about the relationship between the city, in its role as an accumulator of wealth, and its physical form. The Greenwich - Stanford corridor where so many of those corporations which resisted the tax incentives offered by a rattled New York City to encourage them to stay ended up, must be

understood as just as much a part of the wider urban region of New York as Lower Manhattan. But in its physical form it is entirely different: low density, and with little physical infrastructure to permit the casual interaction which is the traditional quality of the city. In Whyte's view then, the exurban form is not one that can be said to sustain job creation in the sense that the dense urban model can. The developers who built the business parks were building for jobs not cities. If they had built genuine cities, as is arguably the case in Canary Wharf in London, then they might have built more jobs in the long term.

Of course there are celebrated examples in other urban regions in which exurban agglomerations have turned into the kind of innovative clusters that have indeed generated jobs. Silicon Valley was the classic example. The reality is that a city as large and as complex as New York experiences both phenomena simultaneously.

New York has areas of exurban growth where companies go in search of space that costs less than the prime business areas of downtown. And even these areas could well learn from Whyte by exploring ways in which the physical structure might be modified in ways that could begin to replicate at least some of the traditional qualities of urbanism that encourage those face-to-face transactions that the traditional city does so well. But it also has areas in the inner core, such as the garment district, and silicon alley which have proved important incubators for the growth of new jobs. However this process has itself put at risk some of the traditional employment generators in these areas, especially those which have traditionally offered jobs in the reach of the newcomers to the city who make up 65 % of the population of New York.



TRAVELING LESS, LIVING BETTER. WHO PAYS?

Transport policy is struggling to keep up with the changing shape of the city

In one way at least New York is the most European of America's big cities. The city depends on public transport to a far greater extent than Los Angeles or Houston or even Chicago. Just over 50 per cent of New York City's working population travel to work by public transport. Like London – where the figure is around 40 per cent, it began building its transit system in the 19th century, and also like London, its explosive period of growth in the first half of the 20th century was fuelled by suburban railway lines.

But then New York had Robert Moses to build the parkways, while London produced a very different civic figure, Frank Pick to usher in the golden age of London Transport's unified system of buses and tube trains, tied together with a network of elegant station architecture, its specially designed typeface,

and its iconic system map. Both cities struggled to live up to those glory days throughout the 1970s and 1980s when they appeared locked in a downward spiral of decline, with poorer standards of comfort and safety, dwindling passenger numbers. Their systems struggled to follow the flow of people to the edge of the new car based suburbs, Paris and Tokyo managed to integrate their suburban railway networks with rapid transit underground lines. London has seen what such lines have to offer but has so far failed to match them. New York hasn't even tried.

Public transport is not only an issue of numbers, operating it efficiently requires skill and sophistication, and an urban structure which favours it. New York for example, may have substantially more buses than London, but London makes better use them; they carry more people, more miles than New York's. The early archaeology of the underground

lines left its mark on New York, as did the gaps between them. The same is true of its three separate commuter rail networks – Metro North, the Long Island Rail Road, and NJ TRANSIT. This system shrank substantially in the 1950s. The possibility of re-opening previously abandoned lines, especially in New Jersey is now an option while Metro North has plans to extend their Harlem and Hudson lines.

It is only the investment of vast sums of money in New York's transit systems that reversed decades of decline. Since the early 1980s \$30 billion, or more than \$1.5 billion per year, has been spent on replacing and rehabilitating the New York metropolitan area transit systems. Fifty-six hundred subway cars, upwards of 1,000 commuter cars and 4,300 buses have been either purchased or overhauled. The subway system has restored over 500 miles of track and refurbished over

60 stations. Of the \$30 billion, just over half (\$15.2 billion) has been spent by the MTA for the NYC subway system, almost \$1 billion per year for the 16-year period. The Port Authority has spent over \$1.3 billion on PATH and the three commuter rail networks have used almost \$10 billion to upgrade their capital plant. Over \$3.1 billion has been spent on the bus networks in the two states.

London is currently in the midst of an equally ambitious bout of investment in its transit services, though it has already achieved some tasks which have so far eluded New York such as connecting its main airport to the mass transit system.

The question both cities face is where to invest next, in terms of achieving the greatest return, and how they will meet the long term cost of financing these projects.

SQUEEZING THE MIDDLE

Housing policy and its discontents

The Urban Age conference is examining the wider issues that are raised by the provision of housing in mature cities such as New York through the focus of the future of a number of key sites in the city. Each of them demonstrates an aspect of the pressures that are tending to squeeze the middle class out of the city centre, a movement which in turn puts pressure on other, more peripheral areas.

A tendency common in every big city is for neighbourhoods to become more locally homogeneous, and so segregated from the diversity of the wider social fabric of the city. It is a tendency that is represented at its most extreme and negative way by the gated community, and in a more positive way by the tendency of ethnic communities, or creative artists, or young singles, to cluster together.

The conference looks at how immigrant

and minority populations fare in the New York housing market, a city with 65 per cent of its people drawn from ethnic minorities, compared with 28.8 per cent in London. Do negative effects on the nature of individual neighbourhoods outweigh the positive effects of concentrations? What impact is this form of urban differentiation and fragmentation having on the cohesion of the city, and the quality of urban life? Assuming that such a tendency is not necessarily an entirely positive one; cities need to take steps to encourage the creation, or the safeguarding of built environments that can support diverse neighbourhoods and inclusive local communities. In particular, it is not only forms of tenure and questions of affordability that have a significant impact on these issues. The physical and spatial form of housing and urban design can serve to enhance the coexistence of various social groups, including families, that opt for "city life" over suburbanization.

The starting point in most discussions of urban design is the question of density. It has become something of a given that high density makes for vitality in a city, providing the sheer numbers of people in the concentrations needed to support everything from a mass transit system to schools, cinemas, public libraries and post offices. In New York City, gross residential density is 71.1 persons per hectare, while in London it is 45.6 persons. In New York it is 33.9 per cent of households that have children under 18, compared with 28.6 per cent in London.

High density cities are also regarded as better suited to reducing dependence on the private car, and thus bringing a range of environmental benefits. But it is not necessarily the case that all parts of a city should be equally dense. If high urban densities are considered a desirable goal, then so is home ownership, and these may not be compatible. If that is the case, then we need to determine the best

policy mix to try to achieve both. Is there such a thing as an optimum urban density? And how much variation in density should there be between dense urban cores and more sparsely developed peripheral areas?

In the context of a city with as dense an urban core as New York, and its competition for land between housing and industry, how much room is left for new or in-fill developments. This is an issue which it is within the reach of local government to influence directly through re-zoning and permitting the conversion of the city's waterfront and industrial areas. The regulatory system in New York City certainly influences the city's potential for growth. But what are its strengths in terms of providing city residents with the stability that communities need to flourish?





FEELING SAFE IN THE CROWD

The changing nature
of public space
Richard Sennett

One of the most pressing social issues today is 'civility,' which means much more than good manners or breeding. It names the capacity of people to live together, beyond legal dictates or police coercion to behave well. Civility is a particular concern in cities, because of the density and diversity of urban places; only the most elaborate laws, the most intrusive policing can control behaviour in the complex society of the city. Such total control is hardly a desirable social ideal. In the end, getting along well with foreigners, people who are richer or poorer or of a different race, are all matters which should be engrained into everyday life.

Much current urban policy has given up, however, on civility. The 'zero-tolerance' approach to policing assumes that unless every small offence against public order is punished, larger offences will ensue; society cannot steady itself without the draconian threat of daily, detailed punishment. The emergence of gated communities is based on a kindred premise; to be safe, urban enclaves have to be rigidly regulated; open communities will degrade into disorder. These new practices join classic means of social control such as racial and religious segregation and ghettoisation, which established forbidden territories – on the premise that people who differ cannot and should not live together.

How then can civility be restored to the city? That broad question has a physical, and indeed architectural, dimension. We can design spaces and buildings which encourage people to behave well toward one another. The different histories of London and New York support this assertion. The continuous street-walls throughout New York, for

instance, contained people's activity in public, and made public behaviour visible – the phenomenon Jane Jacobs once called 'eyes on the street.' Gap-tooth streets of isolated buildings do not, by contrast, form such a visible container for civility. London parks have worked to the same end by a different means, when, as in Hyde Park, large stretches of lawns dominate over plantings of trees. Again, the spreading of housing estates for the poor throughout London meant that rich and poor became accustomed to one another, and adjusted to one another, with a relative minimum of police enforcement; when London began building huge housing estates, warehousing the poor, the police had to take the place of social habits.

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LSE Cities Programme

The Cities Programme was established at the London School of Economics and Political Sciences in 1996. Our main objective is to link the urban social sciences with the design of cities' built environment and infrastructure. As an international centre of excellence in the social sciences, the LSE has a longstanding commitment to an innovative understanding of urban society.

Our purpose is simple and broad: to improve the quality of the built environment. The design of urban buildings, places and spaces is often at odds with the needs of urban society. We aim to make the built environment more socially sensitive, and to make people more aware of the social role of architecture and planning. In 2003 the programme formalised its consultancy and research work by setting up Enterprise LSE Cities Limited.

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The Alfred Herrhausen Society for International Dialogue

The Alfred Herrhausen Society is a centre of independent thinking that seeks to identify traces of the future in the present, and thereby raise public awareness of the directions in which society is moving. As Deutsche Bank's socio-political think tank, the Herrhausen Society brings together people who are committed to working for the future of civil society.

Founded in 1992, the Society is dedicated to maintaining and building on the legacy of Alfred Herrhausen.

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We are redefining the challenges facing metropolitan America and promoting innovative solutions to help communities grow in more inclusive, competitive, and sustainable ways.

www.brookings.edu/metro/

Minerva LSE Research Group

The Minerva LSE Research Group is a ground-breaking joint venture between Minerva and the LSE Cities Programme, which undertakes original research initiatives into key factors impacting on urban development with the intention of influencing public policy. In 2004 the group published – Density and Urban Neighbourhoods in London.

Minerva is one of the UK's largest property investment and development companies with gross assets of over £1 billion. It is listed on the London Stock Exchange and is a constituent of the FTSE 250.

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The London School of Economics and the Alfred Herrhausen Society for International Dialogue would like to apologise for any confusion that has arisen by adopting the name 'Urban Age' for the series of conferences on cities. The Urban Age Institute, a US-based organisation which is partnered with the World Bank, has published the Urban Age Magazine since 1990, recently relaunched in Fall 2004 (www.UrbanAge.org). The Urban Age Institute shares many of the same goals and objectives as our series of conferences, and we apologise for any inconvenience caused to them. We would like to draw the attention of all participants to a forthcoming conference on sustainable urban development which takes place in New York City in March 2005 (www.acteva.com/go/MarchOne)

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NEW YORK/FEBRUARY 2005

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