



# The Scholar's View

## Mapping Urban Ecology

Volume 1, Issue 1

### Humankind's Greatest Creation: Diversity

Joel Kotkin, author of *The City: A Global History*, expresses, "Humankind's greatest creation has always been its cities" (Kotkin XX). Having lived in and around a major metropolitan city all my life, I

would agree with this statement. Humankind's greatest success has always been a product of the diversity it maintains. Our cities have been able to thrive on a wide range of ideas. Cities, Kotkin later explained, "represent the ultimate handiwork of our imagination as a species, compressing and unleashing the creative urges of humanity. From the earliest beginnings, when only a tiny fraction of humans lived in cities, they have

been the places that generated most of mankind's art, religion, culture, commerce, and technology" (XX). The most critical factor in developing and sustaining a healthy city is its diverse people.



*The city of Philadelphia taken on the March 1, 2009*

#### Inside this issue: Humankind's Greatest Creation : Diversity

Jane's Walk Experi-	1-2
What Makes a Healthy	3
Sense of Choice	3
Does Money Still Hold	4
Urban Art	4
Urban Ecology	5
Conclusion	6-7

#### Special points of interest:

- Density and Diversity
- Cities
- Jane'sWalk
- Green Spaces
- Urban Art
- Networking
- Bridging the Gap

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# Mapping Urban Ecology

## Jane's Walk Experience

As part of my college writing course, I had to experience a Jane's Walk in the city of Easton and Philadelphia. A Jane's Walk, "is a series of free neighborhood walking tours that helps put people in touch with their environment and with each other, by bridging social and geographic gaps and creating a space for cities to discover themselves" (Jane's Walk USA 1). On

the Philly and Easton Jane's walk, I could physically view but also experience them emotionally and spiritually. As I was walked down the streets of Easton I felt a little nervous because Easton is not a pedestrian-friendly



*Mural of the State Theater Located in Downtown Easton while on our Jane's Walk*

city and I felt I had to keep my head on a swivel to watch out for cars. On the other hand, Philly had more pedestrian-friendly sidewalks, which made it easier to cross the street. I was awestruck by the massive buildings

## City of Brotherly Love

the churches and cathedrals erected from marble and brick. Above all, I was more captivated with all the diverse types of people who crowded the streets of Philadelphia. Each creative in their own right, they gave the city its own sense of place. It then became clear that it's not the buildings and the high-priced bachelor

pads that make the city. It's the people - workers, pedestrians, children, parents, seniors that make the city. The quote, "Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love" did not refer to all the love the buildings showed but rather to how the people laugh, play, converse, and interact with each other. As stated by Anya Kamenetz

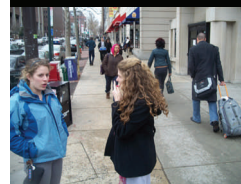
*"Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love"*

netz in her article entitled, The Laws of Urban Energy, "The it-

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factors of urbanism are density and diversity" (Kamenetz 2). Later in the article, Kamenetz argues that cities promote an atmosphere that generates creativity and innovation (Kamenetz 1). Kamenetz articulates:

"The potential edge that urban dwellers enjoy over their country cousins can be linked to having more and different people to meet, and more meeting places—parks, coffee shops, parties, or simply the sidewalk. Population size isn't



*People conversing at a local traffic intersection*

the only measure of urbanism, of course—someone who lives and works in a walkable

## What Makes a Healthy City?

different people in a day, from neighbors to shopkeepers, while someone who lives in a gated enclave in Los Angeles and drives an hour to work may exchange words only with her spouse and a few office mates” (Kamenetz 2).

This holds evident because in a city, you’re more likely to meet and converse with to many types of people from different cultures,

nationalities, ages, social statuses and sexual orientations. As Kamenetz states, “the great advantage of cities is your access to a full-bore spectrum of minds, from Nobel Prize winners to that guy muttering to himself on the subway” (Kamenetz 4).



*College Students and children from the EACC working together to make a mural*

This gives rise to the question that I have been asking myself since my Jane’s walk experience: What is a healthy city? As stated by the Healthy City Fall River organization, a healthy community is a place where people come together to

## Sense of Choice

together to make their community better for themselves, their neighbors and others in their community (Healthy City Fall River 1). Joe Flower in his article entitled, Healthy Cities – Healthy Communities states:

“The health of a community grows from how many children people have, in what kind of fami-

lies, with how much money and education, from a sense of choice, and from friends and family who give life meaning, from clean water and air, and basic medicine, from families who eat well, are well housed, secure from crime, and not deranged by drugs or alcohol” (Flower 1).

*“A healthy community...Gives life meaning”*

This holds true if the people are active in their communities and

## Resources

and are willing to educate, promote, and demonstrate to their fellow neighbors. In turn, people become more willing to congregate and have a sense of pride, gratification, and ownership in their community. A healthy com-

munity creates ongoing dialogue, generates leadership everywhere, shapes its future, embraces diversity, knows itself, connects people and resources, and fosters a sense of community (Healthy City Fall River 1). For all of this to work



**Mayor of Easton:  
Salvatore Panto**

the community must work together and use all of its resources. One key resource through which the community can stay involved

## Does Money Still Hold the Power?

political leaders. Kamenetz argues that in an urban environment, people learn, understand each other, and trust each other more (Kamenetz 2). By having this trust, communities can be empowered with aides and grants provided by their state officials.

Money is the root of all evil but also good. Some might say that this is the difference between

higher and lower class income communities. The higher income communities receive more funding for renovating and refurbishing their neighborhoods while the lower income communities have to work with what they have and try to get by. This was a recurring theme that came up in



*Picture of the Benjamin Riegel Mansion taken on February 8, 2009*

the Jane's walks. I felt like there were more green spaces and natural beauty in the higher income communities than in the lower income housing projects.

In a way, the higher income communities were using their funds towards planting, gardening, and recreational activities while the lower class

## Urban Art

planting, gardening, and recreational activities while the lower class was using its money toward paying the bills and hiring security for their projects. In contrast, the lower income communities had more visual art surrounding them than the higher income communities. I was able to see tons of beautiful and colorful murals on

the sides of buildings, which led me to believe that even in tough neighborhoods and projects, here too stand people who are willing to dedicate their time and money to a good cause. Murals help bring people together and serve as an environment where age doesn't matter: Each individual can put their own spin on the overall pic-

*"Murals help bring people together and serve as an environment where age doesn't matter"*

ture and not worry about other aspects of their life which might

## Continued...

be going on: gang life, crime, income status. For those couple of hours, one loses his/herself in the passion and pulse of the community. Since the mural is on the side of that building, whoever worked on it can pass through that build-

ing everyday and witness the masterpiece they were apart of and remember all the conversations, laughs, connections they made that day with the other members of their community. As a result, the time that children are spending



*Mural made underground in the trolley station*

to paint these murals is more than the time they are spending to be out in the streets causing harm to

## Urban Ecology

neighbor of mine when I used to live in Washington D.C., murals tell us a story of the wisdom of generations that have lived here and how this community was able to rise from all the crime, war, famine, and chaos.

Now remember “people + nature + urban environment” all contribute to urban ecology (Lafayette Technology Clinic 6). This funda-

mental principle is the basis of what drives and develops a healthy city and keeps it going. This principal will not work if all the people involved are similar. Diverse age groups, multi-cultural backgrounds, nationalities, incomes, and sexual orienta-



***Shows how people and nature and coincide in a urban environment***

tions give rise to new points of view and different ideas that are necessary in the continuance of a healthy city. The main reason why healthy cities/ communities seem to with stand the test of time is because they have people who are willing to change for

## Code Green Revolution

greater good of their existence. As discussed in Hot, Flat, and Crowded by Thomas Friedman, he highlights the Code Green Revolution which I took as a revolution amongst ourselves in which we replace an old system and create a whole new system better equipped for the future. For example, the Toyota Prius hybrid car is a per-

fect example of a new system replacing an old one and creating a whole new function that is greater than the sum of its parts (Friedman 185). The Prius is an example of a revolution in my eyes because it started out as its first of its kind. Now look, almost every brand of car is making their own model of the Green Car

***“People who are willing to change for the greater good of their existence”***

(environment friendly). Toyota went from a problem fix (how to

## Networking

make a car get better gas mileage) to a transformational innovation (how to make a car that produces energy as well as consumes less of it) (Friedman 185). By using this approach in the future, the benefits of ideas like this are as ever-

lasting as the opportunities. Diversity and people willing to change are essential keys to a healthy future for our communities and cities. A healthy city has to have many healthy and diverse communities within its confines. These



***Communities networking together to help each other***

neighborhoods can benefit from each other and be used as a net-

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## Mapping Urban Ecology

With the cooperation of all parties: political leaders, religious figures, students, parents, elderly, law enforcement, and the blue-collar workers, they can all be a part of something truly special.

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