

## City planners are suggesting that children are troubling

September 4, 2014 by [Randy W. Bright](#)

Sometimes you run across articles that seem so ridiculous that you can't imagine them to be serious journalism. That's what I initially thought when I saw the headline - Designing Child-Friendly Cities: More Trouble than it's Worth? - on the Planetizen website.

The author of the article was actually introducing another article when he wrote, "With the Millennial boom in many urban centers, many cities are looking for ways to retain young families rather than losing them to the traditional suburban exodus. One columnist dares to ask: Do cities even need kids?"

The Washington Post article he was referring to, It's Hard to Build Cities for Kids. But Do We Really Need Them? had made the point that cities with children were much more expensive to develop and maintain if there are children.

The author of that article, Lydia DePillis, wrote, "It's 2014, and Washington D.C.'s municipal government is blessed. The city has become a magnet for young, educated, ambitious people with healthy incomes, which they shower on the swanky shops and restaurants that have bloomed along former riot corridors of the resurgent capital. From a mayor's perspective, that population is a gold mine: They pay lots of income and sales taxes, and attract more companies looking for white-collar workers."

She continued, "Families, on the other hand, are expensive. Kids require schools, which can make up the biggest single chunk of a city's budget. They spend more time in municipal parks and recreation centers, and create problems that social service agencies have to help solve. Their parents save more for their kid's futures, rather than spending today, and buy food in bulk rather than going out to eat."

DePillis also cited a Brookings Institution study that claimed that while a two-parent family with two children costs a city \$6,200 per year, a childless couple will actually save a city \$13,000 per year.

On the other hand, DePillis points out that the same study assumed that families with children were lower income and less educated, when in fact the wealthy childless couples eventually became wealthier couples with children.

Author Joel Kotkin of the NewGeography website wrote an article recently that took another view at the thought of childless cities. In his article "Urbanist Goals Will Mean Fewer Children, More Seniors Needing Government Help," he points out the damaging aspect of cities with dwindling numbers of children.

He wrote, "America's cognitive elites and many media pundits believe high-density development will dominate the country's future. That could be so, but, if it is the case, also expect far fewer Americans - and far more rapid aging of the population. This is a pattern seen throughout the

world. In every major metropolitan area in the high-income world for which we found data - Tokyo, Seoul, London, Paris, Toronto, New York, Los Angeles, and the San Francisco Bay area - inner-core total fertility rates are much lower than those in outer areas."

Not surprising, Kotkin states that "In virtually every case, family size expands the closer one gets to the periphery (of cities)," meaning that populations that have a well-balanced mix of all ages of people are occurring in the same suburbs and exurbs that are routinely demonized by urban planners.

But DePillis points out that when schools in cities become high quality, only wealthy families can afford the school districts that support them. The result is "gentrification" - meaning that lower income families are essentially driven out by higher living expenses and property taxes.

She wrote, "The city's best chance to keep its population in balance over the long term - bringing in and keeping the wealthy while allowing the poor to stick around - is to build as densely as possible in areas the childless enjoy, which frees up roomier row houses that families prefer."

The problem is, most families are in the suburbs for a reason, one of which is that dense developments are a poor place to raise children.

Lest you think that urban planners don't take the idea of childless cities seriously, I can personally attest to hearing John Fregonese, when he spoke to the Tulsa AIA (American Institute of Architects) about the coming demographic of TINKs - two incomes, no kids. It was his belief that Tulsa should be developed that way, but Tulsans rejected that concept.

However, there are plenty of cities that are, whether intentionally or not, following that path, just as we have seen them routinely rejecting churches.

So if churches are already being dropped out of city plans, why would those cities be reluctant to drop children out as well?



Randy W. Bright, AIA, NCARB, is an architect who specializes in church and church-related projects. You may contact him at 918-582-3972, [rwbrightchurcharch@sbcglobal.net](mailto:rwbrightchurcharch@sbcglobal.net) or [www.churcharchitect.net](http://www.churcharchitect.net). Previous articles written by the author are available for reading at his website. ©2014 Randy W. Bright