

Taylor, in their distinctive ways, call for a radical shift away from the common and in their view less pertinent debate between traditionalists and progressives.

Soja, Rowe, and Taylor refocus our attention on the perspective most shared by the essayists, despite their many divergent points of view. To serve an urban world requires a far broader concept of the processes and forms of urbanization than we tend to acknowledge or deploy from our memory bank of good cities. To be urban-minded means learning from Las Vegas and Venice and Shanghai but not conflating these into a universal formula for future urbanization. To be urban-minded requires genuine affection for the energy and messy vitality of cities, and seeking inspiration in that vitality rather than distilling it into a few set patterns. To be urban-minded requires an inquiring sensibility and acceptance of multiple inputs—yes, being a generalist, but a synthesizing generalist, not a dilettante.

Having begun by quoting Varro, whom Cicero referred to as “the most learned of all Romans,” I would like to conclude with Zippy. I find the cartoon reproduced here heartening not because of its anti-sprawl message (although it is as effective as the spate of words lately deployed against sprawl) but in the contrasting images of what is and is not “good for you.” What Zippy renders as good for us is an urban scene: a place, density (as opposed to congestion), spatial containment, overlap of activities, a particular spot on the earth with its promise of social propinquity: the essence of what urban design should provide for an urban species. At that famous 1956 conference, David L. Lawrence, then mayor of Pittsburgh and well into the “urban renewal” of his downtown, expressed a similar message: “Civilization cannot be a string of country villas, or a sprawl across the landscape of incomplete satellites revolving around nothing.”



Zippy cartoon, originally published June 17, 2001. Reprinted with permission of Bill Griffith.