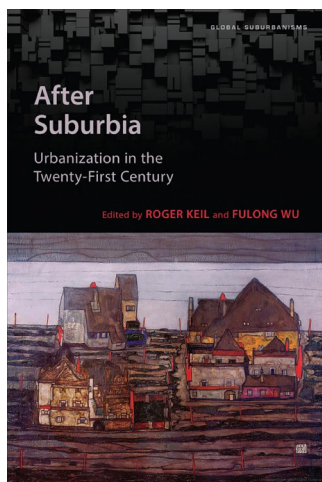


Keil, Roger; Wu, Fulong (eds.) (2022): After Suburbia. Urbanization in the Twenty-First Century


Sebastian Dembski

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“After Suburbia” is the tenth output of the “Global Surbanisms” project led by Roger Keil at York University in Toronto (Canada) and is part of the eponymous series by University of Toronto Press. As you would expect from the esteem of the collaborators on the project, the book provides an excellent overview of contemporary scholarship on the urban periphery. The edited volume includes 21 chapters which are distributed across three parts plus a conclusion. The first part of the book offers a number of openings setting the scene for the next part, which consists of chap-

✉ **Dr. Sebastian Dembski**, Department of Geography and Planning, University of Liverpool, Roxby Building, L69 7ZT Liverpool, UK
sebastian.dembski@liverpool.ac.uk

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ters on specific case studies following the main themes of the research project looking at land, governance and infrastructure. The final part looks at further avenues for re-searching urbanisation after suburbia. The chapters are separated by two visual essays by *Ute Lehrer* and *Markus Moos* consisting respectively of photos from student excursions and metropolitan maps. These are, however, very small and would have benefitted from colour printing. The contributions cover Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe and North America, so the book truly lives up to the ambition of the research project to be global. In this review, I briefly describe the content before reflecting on the key conceptual contribution of the book and its implications for urban and regional planning.

Apart from the introductory chapter by *Roger Keil* and *Fulong Wu*, the first part (“Openings”) contains a series of conceptual reflections and evidence concerning spatial changes in the periphery. *Solly Angel* outlines the scale of the new periphery, with cities having doubled in area within the space of 25 years while densities have declined. Although rich in data, the chapter is written in a language that does not require familiarity with data science. *Alessandro Balducci*, *Valeria Fedeli* and *Camilla Perrone* give a glimpse of a fascinating research project mapping Italian urbanisation, but without the actual maps, which mainly whets the appetite. The following two chapters by *Roberto Monte-Mór/Rodrigo Castriota* and *Richard Harris* involve the introduction of the concept of extended urbanisation by the former and a critique of it by the latter, providing a fascinating read.

In the second part (“Land, Infrastructure, Governance”), most chapters focus on infrastructure and governance, sometimes in combination. I would have liked to see more chapters on land, which is both a critical resource and a driver of suburban development. The only chapter on the subject is that by *Shubhra Gururani*, which is quite specific

though none the less fascinating, looking at suburbanism in agrarian societies with Delhi in India as a case study, and highlighting that suburbs incorporate both the urban and the rural. The other chapters focus on the role of planning and planners, emphasising the need for and role of citizen participation in infrastructure planning (chapters by *Crystal Legacy* and *Pierre Fillion*), state entrepreneurialism in China (*Fulong Wu*) and the role of planning in co-producing the urban configuration and intrinsic challenges for planning (*Pierre Hamel*), to which we shall return at the end.

The third part (“After Suburbia – The Path Ahead”) consists of a mix of theoretical reflections and in-depth case studies, although the chapters are perhaps less future-oriented than I had expected from the title. *Rob Shields* raises the important question of decolonising the suburban, in his case focusing on the absence of indigenous communities in North America in the history of suburbs. *Ilja van Damme* and *Stijn Oosterlynck* look at the future by analysing the past future. *Jennifer Robinson* highlights the diversity of suburbanisms and challenges for conceptualisation, for which the chapter by *Robin Bloch*, *Alan Mabin* and *Alison Todes* on Africa serves as an excellent illustration. *Matt Hern* provides quite a personal account of the marginalisation of suburbs but also their purpose as places to live. The chapter on suburban vibrations by *Paul Maginn* and *Christine Steinmetz* adopts an interesting angle by looking at representations of sexuality in suburbs in films and the location of adult stores, depicting a sexual morality which is little different from the city. In a fascinating case study of the Lippo Group, *Abidin Kusno* demonstrates how big capital and landholdings combined with a good deal of corruption shape the future of the periphery in Indonesia. Finally, the chapter on Manila suburbs in the Philippines by *Arnisson Ortega* provides a fascinating account of how transnational networks shape local development through the transfer of policy ideas, residential development and vernacular architecture.

The Conclusion by *Roger Keil* mainly reflects on the meaning of after suburbia, which warrants a more detailed discussion. Definitions matter for “shaping planning and policy problems”. One of the central takeaways of the book is in the title – after suburbia – which seem to suggest that the suburban age is over. It is fascinating to see how the collective of authors grapple with the idea. One of the key problems identified is the Anglo-centric nature of the concept, strongly based on the North America of the 1950s. Others highlight its urban bias (*Shubhra Gururani* and *Ilja van Damme/Stijn Oosterlynck*). This becomes particularly

evident when taking a Global South perspective, where suburbs are not usually the result of an outward movement of the population from the urban core but “an approach to the city” (Phelps quoted in *Robinson*, p. 282). Suburbs are diversifying ever more – a fact that all contributors agree on – but whether this means that suburbs no longer exist is a matter of debate, with *Richard Harris* (p. 120) making a strong case that “suburbs, those ‘in-between spaces’, still have a distinctive, if fuzzy and fragile, identity”. The challenge is to find a vocabulary that combines the mono-functional North American suburb that continues to exist and the diverse and dynamic tapestry that is evolving in parallel. Perhaps much depends on the emphasis individual authors want to put on the urban periphery: the use of the notion of suburban vocabulary emphasises the distinction from the traditional city whereas the notion of after suburbia emphasises the non-traditional nature of these suburbs.

What is in it for planning as a discipline, broadly defined? Apart from increasing our awareness of the dynamic nature of the urban periphery and providing some conceptual clarity, the book presents a couple of lessons. The first relates to the substantive task of guiding the continuous growth of the periphery, particularly in the Global South. According to *Solly Angel*, planning has failed the peripheries. He recommends strategic planning, including strategic land policy, to accommodate growth by creating the transport infrastructures for the future, making reservations for public spaces, and embracing alternative and informal modes of development. The second lesson by *Roger Keil* but also others is of a more procedural nature, pleading for a rethinking of how we govern the urban periphery and arguing that more horizontal and thus less city-centric approaches are necessary. Both lessons are, of course, not entirely new but remain challenging in practice as powerful actors use their institutional capital to block such advances!

Overall, the book consists of a good mix of conceptual reflections and fascinating case studies. The advantage of an edited volume is that you stumble across academic scholarship that you would miss through a directed search. The book demonstrates the breadth of scholarship and ideas on the urban periphery, even if it does not, and does not claim to, solve the conceptual confusion.

Full reference of reviewed title:

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