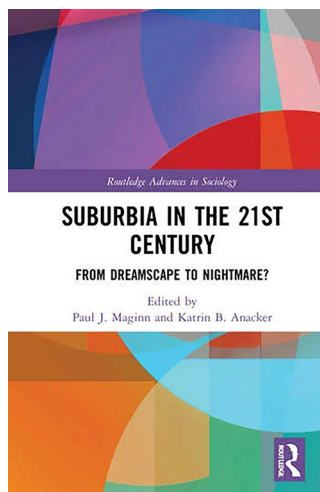


Maginn, Paul J.; Anacker, Katrin J. (eds.) (2022): Suburbia in the 21st Century: From Dreamscape to Nightmare?

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This edited volume “Suburbia in the 21st Century: From Dreamscape to Nightmare?” is a welcome and timely contribution to the urban studies literature in at least three respects. First, despite increasing attention for ‘suburbia and beyond’ in recent decades, urban studies are still very city-centric and suburbs are often perceived as less relevant, less interesting and/or subordinate to city centres. It is good to see a book in which suburbia is the focus of attention instead. As indicated in the introduction, this book connects

to the ‘centring the periphery’ perspective introduced by the LA School in the 1990s and recently elaborated further by the ‘Global Suburbanisms’ initiative and the York+ School. Second, suburbia is often over-generalised, but this book demonstrates that suburbs are “diverse, dynamic and complex spaces” (p. 7). They were built in different times, with different relative positions in the city-regions, for different purposes, for different target groups, etc. While some suburbs have managed to flourish and remain attractive living environments ever since they were built, others have fallen out of grace and have proved (or will prove) less resilient to crisis and/or changing demands and preferences. The dynamics of suburban development in recent decades have also included the emergence of something which so far, for lack of a better term, has been described as ‘post-suburbia’, a concept discussed in several chapters of this volume. Third, the question whether and for whom suburbia is or was a ‘dreamscape’ or a ‘nightmare’, or something in-between, has been posed for about as long as suburbia has existed. However, this question may be more urgent than ever after the impact of a series of crises in the early 21st century with varying impacts on city centres and suburbs: amongst others the foreclosure crisis and, more recently, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and policy responses to it.

Most of the book is well structured, making it a coherent and consistent whole. This is always a major challenge for an edited volume, but the book editors have made a good effort to ensure this book is more than an eclectic collection of contributions. The introductory chapter by the book editors is followed by three sub-themes with four chapters each: ‘Representations of Suburbia’, ‘To Suburbia and Beyond’, and ‘Dreamscape or Nightmare?’ The introductory chapter sets the scene by presenting an overarching conceptual framework and introducing the three sub-themes and the chapters that are part of them. In the three parts, a good

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balance is found between common themes and perspectives on the one hand and diversity in thematic and geographic focus on the other. However, the concluding chapter is not really a conclusion, but rather an additional analysis revisiting the ‘Dreamscape or Nightmare?’ sub-theme from the specific perspective of ‘COVID-19 (sub)urbanisms’. Of course it makes sense to have a chapter dedicated to the impact of COVID-19 and the policy responses to it, and the extent to which this may have, or should, change how we perceive suburbia, its relationships to the (central) city and its positioning in the city-region. Still, though some connections to previous discussions are made in this chapter, it would have been better to end the book with a final reflection in which the common framework of the introductory chapter is revisited, lessons learned are discussed, and a research agenda for follow-up research is proposed.

The book includes case studies from three continents: North America (USA and Canada), Europe (Finland, France, Ireland, Spain, UK) and Oceania (Australia). Though it is of course impossible to cover all global variations of suburbia in one edited volume, the book thus fails to live up to its promise to discuss ‘suburbia around the world’, or ‘global (sub)urbanisms’. Unfortunately, only advanced capitalist countries in the Global North are represented; and as the book editors acknowledge in their introduction, the cases also represent a particular political category – ‘advanced Western liberal democracies’ (p. 17). Several countries in the Global South and Global East now have quite extensive suburbs around their major urban centres too. Suburban developments in these countries are often inspired by their Global North counterparts and designed and built by foreign architects and developers. However, more original local variations on the suburban theme may also be found, as well as a rapidly increasing

number of examples of policy and design transfer and investment flows between Global South and/or Global East countries. Think for example of the many ‘new towns’ and ‘satellite cities’ that have already been built or are being planned across the Global South and Global East. It would also have been interesting to see some Southern cases in the book to enable North-South and West-East comparisons. Furthermore, even within the Global North, some regions are unfortunately missing. In Europe, for example: although the European case studies represent quite diverse regional and national contexts, Central and Eastern Europe are left out entirely. In addition to more diverse world-regional contexts, it would also have been interesting to explore more diverse political contexts: what about suburbia in ‘illiberal democracies’ and authoritarian regimes? Moreover, some international comparisons would have been a good addition to the single-country (or single-region or single-city) case studies that all chapters except the introduction and the last chapter are based on.

Still, this volume can definitely be recommended to academics, students and policymakers interested in the state of the art in this emerging field of study and in the search for refreshing and innovative perspectives on suburbia. Hopefully it can also contribute to taking next steps in the debates on suburbia as well as city-regions in the 21st century, moving beyond ‘cityism’ and leaving the traditional prejudiced perspective on suburbia behind.

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