#### **CHAPTER 1**

#### INTRODUCTION

The framework of growth, however hastily devised, tends to become the permanent structure. For better or for worse, the American suburb is a remarkable and probably lasting achievement.' Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*.

### INTRODUCTION

In the years after world war two American people and businesses of all sorts moved out of cities or approached them by way of the housing tracts, malls and campus industry and office developments that steadily coalesced into a distinct and expansive new ring of outer suburbs around the major cities of the United States. Unlike the muted and scattered urban extensions of European towns and cities, the outer suburbs came to form a near contiguous conglomeration or matrix of elements in an outward expansion of America's major cities. However, like the urban extensions of European towns and cities they were, from the start, more diverse in their origins and complexions than we have come to believe: sometimes embodying the sorts of major employers that attracted subsequent residential development; sometimes representing dormitory communities that demanded shopping malls and employment opportunities in their wake; sometimes coalescing further around rail station towns but at other times stuck out in vast expanses criss-crossed or bounded by major highways instead.

Although there are some reasons to dub the outer suburbs a 'geography of nowhere', there is little doubting that they have come to represent a distinct place of residence, way of life and the location of much new economic opportunity.<sup>iii</sup> Indeed, as Richard Walker some time ago contended, it is hard to conceive of the success of post-war American capitalism without these new suburbs.<sup>iv</sup> They represented a propitious 'spatial fix' for the peculiar strengths of American capitalism during this time and the surpluses being made.<sup>v</sup> 'Suburbanization provided investment

Europe, anchored national prosperity'. During the 1950s and 1960s 'government articulated a national interest in central city revitalization, while at the same time promoting massive redistribution of population and capital investment from central cities to suburbs'. The benefits of employment decentralisation to the outer suburbs clearly accrued to Federal government in terms of national economic performance. It hardly seems credible that Federal government was not aware of the fact, and it clearly was complicit in encouraging a process that brought it such gains. Federal and state investments in major new road infrastructure, incentives in the form of mortgage relief, and a 'growth machine' politics and the fledgling, and permissive, planning control of rural counties created something of a tabula rasa for development on unincorporated land. This, at times barely limited, market for development saw local banks, insurance companies, real estate brokers and land speculators, developers and house builders grow into national business entities. The development of outer suburbia became a national business. America's secondary circuit of capital side line in the domestic production of suburbia may yet become a primary international business.

This was a business that fashioned a peculiarly American sense of modernity and which projected it internationally. 'For centuries US cities had never quite been able to overcome the history, urbanity, and civilizing image of European cities. ... What the postwar suburbs gave up in cosmopolitanism and intellectual and cultural depth, they more than made up in prosperity, freedom of choice, and opportunity. Living well was the American revenge on its European origins ...'. Thus, 'although suburbanization was not confined to the United States, the mass suburbanization of single-family detached houses, shopping malls, an automobile-dependent lifestyle, and low-density sprawl was peculiar to it'. 'iBy today, suburbs have 'overwhelmed the centres of cities, creating metropolitan regions largely formed of suburban parts'. 'Si So much so, that at the end of the twentieth century it was possible to look upon the outer suburbs of

America's cities as little short of a new urbanity - the sort of lasting achievement alluded to in the opening quotation.xiii

Or, instead, are the outer suburbs already by now the urbanity of an old, first, modernity? Like so many models and concepts in circulation in urban studies one might argue that the American outer suburbs we have in mind represent a certain vintage of urbanisation. They were the ultimate logical expression of the sorts of personal mobility and attendant organisation of land-use promised by the motor car as early as the first decade of the twentieth century; the expression of bureaucratic, organised capitalism, and; the rational spatial configuration best suited to fighting late modernity's cold war.

For while the outer suburbs are associated with the phenomenal economic success of the American economy during the 1940s through to the 1970s, they also have come to exemplify the contradictions inherent in the urbanisation of capital in general and American capitalism in particular - contradictions that were inherent within the suburban matrix itself. Once a spatial fix allowing American capitalism to flourish, suburbia has itself now become a barrier to further accumulation in the United States.\*\* It can be suggested that these contradictions were latent within the format of outer suburban development and the matrix of interests that have stimulated their development. Some of the barriers that suburbs themselves now represent to future accumulation are registered in present interest in the likes of 'transit oriented development' (TOD), 'smart growth', the retrofitting or repairing of suburbia, and 'The New Urbanism' which each contain explicit critiques of the interests and a development format that is considered to have produced suburban sprawl.

There is certainly enough in present academic and popular debates to realise that much of the shine has been taken off the outer suburbs of this first modernity but is there enough to glimpse the makings of a distinctly new post-suburbanity? This is the question that this book turns to. It is an important question, for while in many respects the outer suburban matrix is

peculiar to America, it has a continuing legacy. It has a legacy within America itself since it is a format of development that continues and is likely to continue for some time into the future given the many coincident interests involved. It is easy to overlook the fact that this legacy will be felt unevenly within America itself as a federation of governmental and regulatory arrangements pertaining to different vintages of urbanisation. A 'one size fits all' urban theory and policy even within the United States, let alone beyond, is unlikely to do.<sup>xv</sup> Just as importantly, the American suburban ideal has a legacy that is yet to come in many other parts of the world. Ominously, it is only since the 1980s and after the 'short American Century' that the American model of suburban living is being exported in earnest.<sup>xvi</sup>

## A SECOND MODERNITY: GLIMPSES OF POST-SUBURBIA?

For Ulrich Beck a politics of a second modernity has emerged as a result of the unintended consequences of a first modernity. Modern capitalism produced a set of significant environmental and social side effects. These have been as much a product of the state as the private sector — after all the private and public sectors became barely distinguishable in what Galbraith memorably termed the 'technostructure' of society in late modernity. Though what people have in mind when they refer to suburban sprawl is something natural or spontaneous, it is as well to remember that sprawl has been thoroughly planned. That is, it is as good an example as any of the technostructure and an associated sense of modernity at work. It has been planned, though doubtless it would also be a good example of the unintended effects of planning interventions. The outer suburbs have made their own significant contribution to the sorts of global environmental risks that Beck identifies as those around which the politics of a second modernity revolve, since the resource and energy usage associated with the suburban format of development and living and working are hard to ignore. As Gonzalez describes 'While urban sprawl policies of the United States can be credited with fostering global economic growth and stability, urban sprawl also has ... significant liabilities: climate change and oil depletion. Both of

these liabilities result directly from the fact that urban sprawl is predicated on the profligate utilization of fossil fuels'.xx

The contradictions of this first modernity are literally seen in concrete in the outer suburbs themselves; in the vast concrete and tarmac expanses of parking lots and structures and building set-backs from curvilinear road patterns. They are registered in the separation of landuses and all that these entail in terms of the daily commute not just back and forth from home to work but also between home and any number of amenities and services such as schools, sports, entertainment and health facilities. They are registered in the swathes of low density housing and its occupants which together present a formidable political barrier to in-fill and a greater density of residential and commercial development. Yet it is precisely such a re-working of the suburban development format that can help deliver viable public transit, local services alongside significant reductions in energy consumption and the potential to address even the once barely imagined externalities of suburbia, such as traffic congestion.

The contradictions of outer suburbia – the unintended consequences of the sort of modern corporate and state planning that were involved in the production of American capitalism's distinctive spatial fix - have become further exposed by rising oil prices, the recent sub-prime mortgage crisis but also demographic and housing preference changes. So much so, that these seem certain to drive some measure of response in terms of the urbanisation of suburbs over the next decades. While for some time after the war, the nation as a whole gained from the movement of business out of cities, the outer suburbs themselves barely benefitted at all while central cities and inner suburbs have born the costs. The unfolding contradictions of the outer suburban spatial fix now appear to raise the spectre of the nation no longer benefitting at all while the costs to pretty much most communities across our metropolitan regions continue to unfold.xxii

For historian Jon Teaford the internal contradictions of Fordist outer suburbs were apparent as early as the 1950s, prompting a subtle change both in the character of local politics and questions regarding the appropriate scale government attending to suburban development. It is these contradictions that prompted the gradual almost imperceptible transformation of residential suburbs into distinctly post-suburban communities displaying distinctly post-suburban politics. While Beauregard is less convinced, I provide some limited confirmation of Teaford's dating of the antecedents of post-suburbia later in this book. In any case, a transformation of suburbs and suburban politics was well under way by the 1970s in the guise of an 'urbanisation of suburbia' and was conspicuous by the 1980s with the rise of the many outer cities and edge cities that had sprung up at the intersections between radial interstate highways and state parkways and the orbital beltways surrounding America's major cities.

As the various public and private interests invested in suburban development grapple with some of these contradictions, it is apparent that they also represent enormous opportunities. The estimated 6 million acres of land in suburban corridors which are developed at around 0.25 floor to area ratio (FAR) as a result of being 75% devoted to parking would supply two thirds of the projected growth in housing needs and three-quarters of employment growth over the period 2010 to 2030.xxiv Thus, for Nelson 'America is changing ... it will mature. This is a contrast to the half century after world war II when America became a suburban nation. ... As it matures, America will likely become an urban society'.xxv

Yet, if the *zeitgeist* is of a sequel to suburbia wanting to be written by *some* architects, planners and civil society organisations under the manifestos for a New Urbanism, TOD, smart growth and the like, it is not one received by all. Indeed - and there's the rub – arguably, the majority of citizens, architects, planners, politicians, land speculators, construction and banking and insurance companies are happy for the story of suburbia to carry on. The production of suburbia '... adds up to an automated system that is sustained by inertia. ... there are few

incentives to try anything different', while the consumers of suburban housing themselves are the key and rather implacable opponents to change and those in need of incentivising.xxvi

As De Jong has recently argued, the future pattern of urbanisation in America is likely to be somewhere in between these two perspectives, not least because of the already 'fragmented sense of what urbanism in America is'.xxvii Joel Kotkin has argued that '... the basic pattern of the future metropolis will be built upon a predominantly suburban matrix dominated by cars, road connections, and construction as is familiar to the denizens of contemporary Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Houston'. \*\*The suburbs of 2050 America that Kotkin is envisaging might form a new paradigm that embodies neither suburban sprawl nor the traditional city format but a multipolar process of suburbanisation at greater density and containing a greater degree of selfcontainment. Taking up Kotkin's call for the need for better suburbs opens up questions surrounding the potential of any urbanisation of the suburbs to deliver a new post suburban urbanity. While the likes of the New Urbanism and interest in TOD and smart growth have begun to gain some purchase in planning and local governmental circles, they coexist with more established thinking regarding the ease, familiarity, utility, profitability and viability of a suburban density and format of residential and commercial development. That any signs of a distinctive post-suburban future for America can only just be glimpsed through this fog of counter claims should not be surprising.

# THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 elaborate a theoretical perspective on post-suburbia and its potential meaning in urban theory and relevance to policy debates. They are followed by three chapters which illustrate these ideas and concerns in three different case study post-suburban communities. Finally, chapter 8 marks a conclusion. If America became suburban in the last half of the preceding century, it may take this century for what is now a suburban nation to become more fully urban again. The glimpses of post-suburban America presented here underline the

difficulties of effecting the sort of systemic change that would be needed for such a transformation of suburbs. However, they also do provide glimpses here and there of something altered in the popular desire for and experience of the suburban way of life, the political will that can exist not just in incorporated communities but surrounding major redevelopment opportunities on unincorporated land, and even partial examples of inter-governmental cooperation that hint at the revival of metropolitan regional scale governance.

To begin with, in the next three chapters of this book I begin by setting out the significance of the post-suburban question – emerging concerns over how to rework suburban space given the already apparent issues of the long-term economic and environmental sustainability of automobile-oriented suburbs and ongoing expectations among citizens and aspirations among politicians for the rounding-out of suburban communities. The vast majority of the population was born in the suburbs of different vintages and much employment exists there, yet the suburbs continue to play a secondary role to historic city cores as laboratories for political, policy and even academic experimentation and discourse.

In and of themselves, suburbs are rarely the focal point of academic theory building. xxix Only very recently have the subjects of suburbia and suburbanization been subject to some significant revision in which a greater variety of historical and present variation in suburbs and their complexion been recognised. XXX Yet, a cohesive field of suburban studies has yet to emerge from fragmented approaches to understanding the suburbs found in, for example, planning, sociology, architecture and urban design, urban morphology, post-modern urban theory and urban and historical geography. This book makes its contribution to a better understanding of one distinctive emerging class of settlements and their economic and political dynamics among a variety of settlement types found in our largest metro regions.

In chapter 2, I *locate* post-suburban communities within the wider metropolitan spaces of which they are a part. Our metropolitan urban regions represent increasingly complex settlement

patterns which embody 'specialised trading places' and a variety of trajectories of growth and decline. xxxi Indeed some question whether terms such as city and suburb are not 'zombie' categories as a result of the ever widening scope of the urbanisation process. Distinguishing a class of post-suburban settlements and considering the potential for evolution of settlements from suburbs to post-suburbs is far from an unproblematic exercise. Yet it can be one ingredient in a theoretical and policy appreciation of the variety apparent within the unity of the urbanisation process.

Specifically, commentators have been vague about how to define post-suburban communities in geographical terms, with Robert Lang's 'edgeless cities' sprawling from inner suburban to exurban locations, Robert Fishman's 'technoburbs' and Kling et al's 'post suburbs' appearing at an urban regional scale. \*\*xxiii\* Perhaps as a result, it is at the county and regional scale that commentators see new relations of governance being fashioned in order to act upon and shape this new urbanity. \*\*xxxiiv\* I argue that post-suburban communities and their politics can and should be positioned within wider metropolitan urban systems. That is, post-suburbs take their place among a range of different settlement types across metro regions - their dynamics being every bit as worthy of study as, for example, declining industrial suburbs or the gentrification of inner cities.

In chapter 3, I suggest that some of the problems of speaking of a post-suburban era are resolved by placing the emergence of post-suburban politics in *historical perspective*; a historical perspective which sees fundamental continuities with previous automobile-oriented suburbanisation.xxxv Specifically, the suburbs formed part of a Fordist 'spatial fix' in which state intervention was deeply implicated. However, the contradictions of state interventions tend to magnify over time so that the unanticipated consequences of suburbanisation come to be a barrier to further accumulation. The emergence of a distinctly post-suburban politics might be seen as one manifestation of what Ulrich Beck regards as a politics of 'second modernity'.xxxvi

Beck's analysis emphasises the politicization of major environmental risks (the side effects) of modernity and processes of individualisation in society associated with the rise of special interest groups and identity politics. Yet the unanticipated effects of state interventions in promoting low-density suburban development can hardly be understated given their significant contribution to environmental risks such as global climate change.

In fact, of course, this historical perspective is also a geographical perspective given the different *vintages* of urban development that exist in America. Just as American urbanisation is not reducible to a single Chicago or Los Angeles model, so too is any post-suburban sequel to suburbia irreducible the California example sketched in an early use of the term. The newest automobile-oriented suburbs *may* be more amenable to reworking if they exist within metropolitan regions with an older vintage of urban development by virtue of extant public transit and other infrastructure networks. Though, as we will see, this also depends on the other specifics of the particular metropolitan context under consideration. New suburbs in new metroregions such as Kendall-Dadeland within metro Miami-Dade county may truly embody a 'splintering urbanism' and have limited prospects for redevelopment."

A string of commentators have spoken of the new urbanity being fashioned in the outer suburbs. However, it is one that is very much in its infancy and one which has only begun to be depicted and analysed in academic terms. It is possible to view the retrofitting of suburbia as insubstantial – a post-modern affectation of developers concerned with creating a sense of place when marketing newly developed residential communities. However, post-suburban politics – viewed as an emerging response to the side effects of modernist suburbanisation – appears to coalesce around possibly more substantial concerns to urbanise suburbia and to 'retrofit' or rework suburban spaces. In and around local debates over the need for, and financial and technical challenges to, reworking suburban space, we see a post-suburban politics being played out. It is one in which the traditional popular and political ideals embodied in suburban living have been

adulterated somewhat.<sup>xl</sup> These traditional suburban ideals have met with the emergent contradictions of suburbanisaton itself in a politics that centres on tensions over: the pursuit of private accumulation (growth) and conservation of the environment; the pursuit of growth and provision for collective consumption, and; appropriate scale and vehicles for governing any post-suburban landscape.

In chapter 4, then, some of the important political and governmental challenges to reworking suburban space are elaborated under these three main headings. First, I consider the tension between the pursuit of private accumulation (primarily as a means of underpinning the local fiscal position of suburban communities) and conservation of the built and natural environment. From the outset, environmental amenity has been sought as part of the suburban way of life and jealously protected by suburban communities. However, it has been overlain recently with an additional layer of environmental politics borne of the commonly-felt side effects of modernity. Second, since, almost by definition, suburbs of all complexions exist as less than cities - that is somehow less than urban in terms of a variety of amenities and services that are consumed collectively – there has existed a politics of collective consumption alongside the licensing of private accumulation of capital. The question of financing and providing for collective consumption needs necessarily enlarges the range of local politics into an arena of inter-governmental cooperation. Third, the prospects for the reworking of suburban space are crucially dependent on the extent and manner in which any rescaling of the state can address the increasing latitude of the collective consumption and environmental corollaries to private accumulation. It is little accident that much suburban development has existed, at least to begin with, on unincorporated county land. By the same token, its successful redevelopment may founder on the lack of a governmental entity dedicated to financing and enforcing planning and infrastructure investment aspirations.

In chapter 4 I therefore draw a distinction between what I term mark I and mark II postsuburban politics. The former was an early and purely locally-oriented response by communities
to some of the contradictions of their suburban character – namely, what Teaford has described
as the adulteration of suburban ideals with pragmatic political and policy responses to the
economic realities of providing for a host of local collective consumption needs. What I term
mark II post-suburban politics is barely in evidence anywhere across the expanses of American
suburban communities but desperately in need in any meaningful sequel to suburbia as it is
implied in the thoughts that the environmental side effects of the suburban format of
development and many of the collective consumption needs of individual suburban communities
can only be addressed at a scale exceeding individual communities.

In the next three chapters I go on to present three glimpses of post-suburban America based on research conducted during the period 2008 to 2012 as part of United Kingdom Economic and Social Research Council and British Academy-funded projects. These chapters draw together local planning and economic development documents, relevant newspaper articles and published and unpublished local histories. Taken together, the chapters also draw on over seventy face-to-face and telephone interviews with local and state politicians and planners, private sector architects and consultant planners, and civic, environmental and business representative organisations.

Originally the three glimpses of America's post-suburban future offered by the cases of Kendall Dadeland (in Miami-Dade County, Florida), Tysons Corner (Fairfax County, Virginia) and Schaumburg (Illinois) were selected as part of the research in an attempt to tell the story of the reworking of edge cities specifically. However, the comparatively dense edge city format of outer suburban development was only briefly popular with developers and is no longer the norm – especially for new commercial development outside of central cities.\* Moreover, it proved

hard to identify many actual instances of the active reworking of the suburban space of such edge cities.

Table 1.1 Summary characteristics of Kendall Dadeland, Tysons Corner and Schaumburg

Kendall Dadeland	Tysons Corner	Schaumburg
<u>Unincorporated</u>	<u>Unincorporated</u>	Incorporated Village,
Miami-Dade County	Fairfax County	Cook County
2000s	2010-present	Future
	Unincorporated  Miami-Dade County	Unincorporated  Miami-Dade County  Fairfax County

Nevertheless, the three cases offer a reasonable coverage of the variety of America's post-war suburbs – a point underlined recently by Nijman and Clery – and the challenges presented in any sequel to suburbia as seen in the summary facts provided for each case in table 1.1.\*\*Iii They offer reasonable coverage of the contrasting geographic scale of the suburban redevelopment challenge, the contrasting administrative context of initiating and implementing that challenge as well as in contrasting vintages of American metropolitan development. As such, then, the three cases are arranged to emphasise progressively the scale of the challenge of reshaping suburban America ending in the case of Schaumburg, which corresponds less to the edge city and more to the expansive edgeless city format that Robert Lang emphasises as the present of suburban America. The three cases present rather different sequels to the suburban

story. They are – as will be elaborated - stories of past, present and future glimpses of postsuburban America.

The first glimpse of America's post-suburban future in chapter 5 comes from the case of an attempt to fashion a new downtown - Kendall-Dadeland downtown - for the sprawling Kendall suburbs of Miami-Dade county in Florida during the 1990s. If 'Postwar Florida came to embody and in turn radiate the values of American culture: youth, leisure, consumption, mobility, and affluence' then Miami-Dade County's landscape of 'sprawl plus' represents something of the physical incarnation of this culture. xliii Somewhat paradoxically, it is in this newest and most center-less of American urban environments that the New Urbanism movement, with its appeals to the urban morphology and architectural styles of the past, has grown up. While it continues to evolve, Kendall-Dadeland downtown is then already part of the past of New Urbanism. It exists as something of an island of success in a sea of a repetitive low density, automobile-oriented, suburban sprawl. While New Urbanism has emerged and grown as something of a new planning orthodoxy, it is also, as this chapter stresses, an orthodoxy which has some very real political, governmental and private corporate limits given the weight of traditional suburban-oriented residential preferences and architectural., planning, construction, financial and political interests in America today. Of the three cases presented, the Kendall-Dadeland story is one that perhaps best highlights the tensions between growth and conservation of the natural environment.

In chapter 6 I recount the story of the growth and present re-planning and redevelopment of Tysons Corner. Tysons is perhaps the archetypal 'edge city'.xliv While private sector land speculators and property developers have been instrumental in its growth, it has also been subject to several plans over the years. The latest of these planning exercises recently won the Daniel Burnham prize from the American Planning Association. It proposes a significant reworking of Tysons Corner's suburban space into a proper downtown. It represents something

of a present-day test case for similar attempts to retrofit the very many edge cities across America. Tysons illustrates clearly how the pattern of government – or perhaps more precisely a lack of government can shape prospects for a sequel to suburbia, since it persists as a city in waiting on unincorporated county land. Nevertheless, it is an even better test case of how economic growth and collective consumption are intimately related. The irony is that a settlement unleashed by federal and state expenditure on roads for private car use is now set to be 'saved' by more federal, state and county expenditure this time on improvements in mass public transit.

The Village of Schaumburg which is the subject of chapter 7 was in some important respects 'born' post-suburban. Incorporated with a tiny population in the 1950s, it was conceived and planned almost from the outset as a new kind of city - a regional capital for the north west suburbs of Chicagoland. Yet its conception as a particular, very diffuse, type of new city also means that the sheer scale and separation of land uses provides a glimpse of the difficulties of building post-suburban communities from the majority of suburban expanses of America - even in the public transit-rich, older and increasingly regionally-planned metropolitan context of Chicagoland. It is the sheer suburban modernity as a planned community that poses the biggest problem to the reworking of space in Schaumburg. Schaumburg has benefited from remarkable continuity and stability in political leadership since its incorporation, though important questions remain over how political leaders will be able to engage and take the resident population with them as they continue to shape this expansive and new kind of outer city in function but not in form. Since Schaumburg was conceived as a new kind of city for the outer north west suburbs of Chicago, it also presents just a glimpse of how its local political leaders, will have to assume a central role within the sorts of inter-governmental cooperation needed to deliver the 'big ticket' items of expenditure for collective consumption such as improvements in mass public transit that will be necessary for a transformation of these communities.

Finally, in chapter 8, I draw together some of the key themes and concerns raised in the opening chapters of the book. In particular I reiterate how the challenge of reworking suburban settlement space is enormously varied given the different ways that suburban settlements relate geographically and temporally to the metropolitan regions of which they are a part. These challenges will likely necessitate new arrangements among governments at the county but also the regional scale. The new post-suburban politics will not be fashioned by a small group of architects, planners or politicians. Instead, any reworking of suburban space is a political process in which all will need to be involved. Since suburban living represents a mass preference, the emergent post-suburban politics will have to command the approval of a mass of resident voters. The will need to be seen to stack up in financial terms to investors and developers. In this respect a number of policy analysts have begun to provide some of the tools for appraising the costs and benefits of sprawl though these have yet to have significant purchase on the thinking of politicians and government planners, transportation, economic development staff and preferences of citizens.

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