Brave New Worlds? 150 years of Irish suburban evolution

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Introduction: 150 years of Irish suburbs

The suburb is relatively under-researched in Ireland, despite its ubiquity.[1] This chapter examines the changing nature, form, function and meaning of the Irish suburb, recognising key phases in its evolution that reflect social, political and economic change. After beginning with early suburbs and their often negative associations, the discussion then addresses the point at which the relationship between city and hinterland begins to change. Following an overview of terminology and key definitional considerations, the next section considers the nineteenth-century middle-class suburb and its importance as a means of social and spatial differentiation. The twentieth century saw the democratisation of the suburb, encouraged by major slum clearance rehousing schemes as well as improved personal mobility through increased private car ownership, while the most recent decades have seen a spread of the suburbs on such a scale that the lines between urban and rural have become increasingly blurred. The examples range from the big cities to smaller towns which have hitherto not been examined. Throughout the discussion it will become clear that the Irish suburb, while broadly following the pattern of Anglo-American suburban history, has its own specific features and aspects which are unique to the Irish context.

Early suburbs: the changing image of marginal locations

While the main emphasis of this chapter is on suburban development from the mid-nineteenth century, it must be acknowledged that suburbs were in existence long before this time. The various (often negative) connotations associated with earlier suburbs are discussed briefly here, in recognition of the fact that in Ireland, as in other countries, the meaning and value placed on suburban living has changed over the centuries. In the medieval period, for example, potentially dangerous or unpleasant activities such as tanning took place beyond the walls of towns and cities. Suburbs were also locations where outcasts, underprivileged or suspect members of society lived, outside the protection of the urban walls and the rights which the status of urban citizenship conferred.[2] Such unsavoury associations were highlighted in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (1385) and Shakespeare's Henry VIII (c. 1612-13). In an Irish context, Andrews has noted that the negative connotations of suburbs led to

their 'cosmetic censorship' in some early maps, as in the case of Thomas Phillip's 1685 town surveys where the many extramural cabins were omitted from the eventual published maps.[3]

The less attractive elements of suburban living persisted in Ireland; one characteristic of the urban landscape of pre-Famine Ireland was the 'cabined suburbs' which crowded the approach roads to most towns.[4] These were generally thatched and little more than hovels. On his visit to Ireland in 1842, William Thackeray observed that Newry was the only town he had seen which had no cabin suburb , while two years previously the Halls had described Castlebar's suburbs as being 'exceedingly wretched as usual' .[5] More than a century later, writing in 1954, Freeman remarked that the last remnants of a 'cabin suburb' could still be seen on the southern outskirts of Drogheda.[6]

The change whereby the suburban areas of Ireland's towns and cities moved from being perceived as 'marginal' in a metaphorical as well as a physical sense, to becoming attractive residential locations, occurred gradually. In most cases the shift happened in the post-Famine period, although there are some suggestions of a changing relationship between the city and its surroundings from the late eighteenth century. At the time of Rocque's 1756 map of Dublin, streets which are now considered to be quite central were, relative to the city's medieval core, located in 'suburban' areas. When originally laid out, Sackville Mall (part of present-day O'Connell Street) was initially seen as an emergent suburban area for elite residents, before losing its social cachet in the nineteenth century.

Ó Gráda describes a combination of factors encouraging the development of suburbs both at the edges of the existing built up area and at a further remove from the city, where villas became popular among the well-off in society, who could enjoy the benefits of healthy air in the country or by the sea, as well as spacious gardens.[7] More generally, the following factors, to varying degrees, contributed to outward movement: an increasing desire for single-family houses and social exclusivity, growing ability and willingness to commute, perceptions of the health of seaside or country air and the desire of landowners to profit from the development of their estates. As this leading edge of development still generally took the form of 'country' villas whose occupants also enjoyed the benefits of a 'town' house, the extent to which these dwellings for the elite in the urban hinterland were truly 'suburban' is debatable. Nevertheless, the establishment of certain areas beyond the city as 'desirable' was an important first step in the process of suburbanisation. For example, Cork's Sunday's Well and Montenotte had already begun to develop as high-status suburbs in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and retain that status to the present day. Similar social

differentiation emerged in Waterford, where the fashionable middle-class suburb of Newtown emerged from the late eighteenth century on the hill to the east of Waterford's old town.[8]

It is also worth observing that, from the first, suburbs were rarely completely residential, as the urban fringe was never a tabula rasa. Pre-existing land uses and specific locational features determined the nature of development. For example, the importance of water power to proto-industrialisation meant that suburban riverbanks could also be hives of industry. Mills along the river Tolka are depicted on the 1760 Rocque map and survived as industrial zones into the 20th century, albeit with different specific uses. A similar pattern can be seen along the Dodder at Milltown and Clonskeagh in Dublin.

These early Irish suburban developments echo Thompson's observations that 'there were suburbs long before the nineteenth century in the sense of places beyond city limits, the outskirts of towns hanging on to the central area physically and economically.'[9] While he highlights the increasing desirability of suburban residences in London from the middle of the eighteenth century, it was not until the nineteenth century that suburban development got underway on a significant scale. At this stage, the physical expansion of the suburbs was also linked to their increasing social relevance as desirable residential locations for the upper and middle classes.

How can we conceptualise suburban change?

These initial observations about early suburbs highlight a number of their characteristic aspects which become important in order to arrive at a working definition of the term 'suburb'. At its simplest, we might ask 'what makes a suburb suburban?' The most obvious answer is a geographical one, suggesting that the suburb is located at the edge of a town or city. However, there is an inherent instability to this definition. A peripheral location at the outset of development, as in the case of Sackville Mall cited above, will rarely remain peripheral over time, as the leading edge of development moves on. It is clear that relative location changes over time, so that a suburb may in fact become perceived as being more 'urban' as it matures. Locations such as Dublin's Stoneybatter or Portobello which were once suburbs are seen and marketed as urban villages in the 21st century.

In fact, suburbs have always been difficult to define, as a lengthy academic literature attests.[10] Locationally, they are in-between town and countryside, neither one thing nor another. Peripheral location is one of three key defining features of suburbs identified by Richard Harris. He also highlights the relative density of suburbs – lower than the city, higher

than the country.[11] The final feature, newness, highlights the rawness of the suburb as a social as well as physical frontier. This social element has been well-considered in an Irish context by Mary Corcoran et al. This final aspect also points to the fact that the suburb is far more than just a physical space, but one which is associated with a particular set of (often shifting) values and meanings, both for its residents and for outsiders. The symbolic importance attached to the suburb as a way of life or cultural signifier will become apparent in the discussion which follows here and in subsequent chapters. The Irish suburb cannot simply be defined in terms of a map location, but is also an imagined space. The fact that it has multiple meanings, becoming different things to different people at different times, increases the inherent difficulty in identifying and discussing the Irish suburb. Indeed, it could be argued that there is no single, easily-defined entity which is the Irish suburb.

As Vaughan et al discuss, one approach to understanding the suburb is to consider 'the relationship between the emergence of suburban space in particular socio-cultural contexts and the range of social practices that are reproduced there over time'. Importantly, they propose that the suburb is a 'distinctively dynamic domain that shapes and is shaped by society over time'.[12] Lewis Mumford famously observed that the suburb is 'a collective attempt to live a private life' and this 'state of mind' aspect is also important in understanding what constitutes the suburbs in an Irish context, particularly outside of the bigger cities.[13]

For the purposes of this chapter, the term 'suburb' is used to denote objective location and the physical structures (i.e. built form). By contrast, 'suburbia' has cultural connotations, referring to the ways of life of a particular group or cultural class, namely suburbanites, the suburban residents. In many cases suburban living in Ireland, as elsewhere, is associated with the single-family residence, most frequently detached or semi-detached, with gardens front and rear. From the twentieth century onwards it was most typically the preserve of the housing estate, particularly in the larger cities. In middle-sized and smaller towns, middle-class suburbanisation was far more likely to take the form of ribbon-type development on the approach roads, where each house was separate and generally individually designed and built, though often drawing on pattern books, of which the many editions of Jack Fitzsimons' *Bungalow Bliss* (from 1971 to 1998) was the most enduring and influential. While set somewhat apart from the town and often on quite large plots, these suburbs are less distinct from the one-off rural housing of the same period but differ in intent – these are clearly suburban houses for residents who have functional links with the town rather than the countryside (a distinction which would become increasingly blurred in the early 21st century).

The suburban housing estate of identical house types was generally associated with working-class housing built by the local authorities. It was not until the 1970s and 1980s that middle-class housing estates began to be established as characteristic suburban style around medium-sized towns.

Classic suburban evolution: nineteenth century Irish suburbs

Suburbs came to be seen in a more positive light as a residential retreat from the city in the nineteenth century, particularly following the celebrated construction of John Nash's villas at Regent's Park in London, described as 'the first piece of suburbia actually built'and a prototype for Victorian suburbs.[14]These developments designed from 1824 at Park Village East and West were also influential because of their built form. They largely comprised classical style stuccoed pairs of villas which appeared to be single houses and influenced the increased social acceptability of the semi-detached residence which gradually came to be seen as a hallmark of suburbia.[15]

From the 19th century, there was a growing desire to 'escape' from the city, first by the upper bourgeoisie (as described by Engels) and later filtering down through the newly emergent middle classes.[16] The process arguably happened earlier in Britain than elsewhere, encouraged by the increasingly unpleasant nature of the industrial city with its smoke-filled atmosphere, high death rates and burgeoning slums, which were frequently depicted as hotbeds of disease, immorality and vice. The deteriorating urban environment was a major spur to outward movement, for those in a position to afford it. Thus, the better-off classes moved first and a new fashion for suburban living became established. The process of suburbanisation gradually filtered down through the social classes, as suburban living became perceived as the desirable goal for all groups in society.[17]

The move out of Ireland's cities and towns was also underway, although even at mid-century a city like Dublin was relatively compact. The compactness does not, however, signify that suburbanisation was not occurring; the suburban mind-set, that new combination of cultural aspects that made suburbs and suburban life different from the urban, was already emerging. The select suburbs to the south of Dublin city, although within walking distance of the centre, comprised a different social world. Their residents could avoid encountering the physical dereliction and unhealthy population of central slums, not to mention the financial costs of the workhouse, hospitals and police, by moving to attractive and healthy suburban surroundings where they could, nevertheless, enjoy the benefits of urban services as required.

In the nineteenth century, the independent governance of suburban townships such as Pembroke and Rathmines was a further signifier of the social gulf between city and suburbs, which was compounded by political and religious, as well as economic, differences.[18]

Cultural shifts towards 'seclusion, privacy and convenience' as well as the desire for greater individuality were features of nineteenth-century social change, which was also being expressed in the middle-class move to suburban living.[19] The increasing divide between 'public' and 'private' space, together with a greater emphasis on domesticity, has been well documented.[20] The suburbanisation process was aided by an expansion in new types of employment, and increasingly those in white collar jobs began to swap the congestion of the city for the perceived quiet, clean respectability of new suburbs, where the private home was seen as a 'haven' or idealised refuge.

The class-ridden Victorian society with its deeply-felt hierarchical differentiations became visible in subtle gradations within the built form. Houses were a particularly visible and powerful statement about status.[21] Given the relatively small-scale nature of the speculative development process, whereby individuals erected only two or three houses at any one time, and streets might take years or even decades to complete, the variety in the style, fabric and texture of the emergent streets is notable. Status and differentiation within suburbs has always been important, from the early nineteenth century which sees subtle/intricate gradations marked by a range of features such as tree planting, house names, or width of road frontages. These meanings were capable of being easily read by contemporary suburbanites, although their subtleties may sometimes be elusive to the present day viewer. Nevertheless, the fact that, to their residents, suburbs are never uniform and monocultural is evident in every era. A mid-20th century song popularised by Jimmy O'Dea names various Dublin suburbs and their supposed idiosyncrasies, before returning to the refrain that 'Thank Heavens we are living in Rathgar'!

The move to the edge of the city, where land was cheaper, gave rise to changes in the types of houses being built. There was a shift from the old urban model of the Georgian terrace to a new suburban type, the semi-detached dwelling – often termed 'villas' - with manicured front lawns, availing of wider plots and greater setbacks. Galavan has traced construction in the 1860s by builder Michael Meade on Dublin's high-class Ailesbury Road, a thoroughfare which had been created by the Pembroke estate to connect Donnybrook with Sydney Parade station.[22] Indeed, the railway companies had been an important force in the opening up of more distant suburbs, as seen in Stillorgan.

Advertisements for the emerging Irish suburbs in the 1850s and 1860s reveal large dwellings on large plots which had a continuing rural or at least semi-rural aspect. For example, a furnished house to let in Stillorgan in the 1860s had room for a cow, while a splendid residence at Friar's Hill in suburban Cork included three acres of land in broccoli, as well as extensive stabling. Frequently, these early plots would undergo subsequent evolution and densification. This phasing is clearly evident and already underway in the case of Friar's Hill, where three smaller cottages had been provided at the edge of the larger plot, while it was noted that the road frontage provided for three further similar houses to be built. Similarly, the attractions to better-off residents also made suburban sites increasingly attractive to convalescent homes and other institutions which favoured 'high and healthy' surroundings. This affected the character of the suburbs at the time, but a century later these relatively large institutional landholdings have given way to higher density housing developments (e.g. current developments on Grace Park Road). A further aspect of the nineteenth-century suburb was linked to the appeal of bathing places, a continuation of the previous pattern of semi-rural villas. Seaside resorts were linked to urban settlements by the burgeoning railway network, as at Monkstown or Bray near Dublin, Ballycotton and Queenstown (now Cobh) near Cork, or Portrush and Portstewart which were holiday destinations for Belfast residents. This facilitated the renting of respectable residences during the summer season, from which the family bread-winner could continue to commute to work in the city.

While studies of Victorian suburbanisation in Ireland have generally focused on Dublin and Belfast, similar processes of spatial and social sorting were going on across the country. Ireland's towns were being reshaped by a range of factors during the nineteenth century, particularly after the Famine. These included migration from the countryside, the development of the railways (and in the cities the tram system), new industrial enterprises and the increasing control of central government, which led to the development of an 'institutional sector' in many country towns, which was the location of the lunatic asylum, gaol, barracks and union workhouse. The nature and siting of such developments generally repelled the middle-class suburban dweller, so that clear social and spatial segregation became a feature of the age, both in the large cities and in smaller towns. By the 1880s, newspaper advertisements seeking accommodation frequently specified a preference for suburban dwellings, often naming the preferred suburb.[23] As the vast majority of the population of all classes still continued to rent their homes, families were quite mobile and

could follow the fashion or move to more modest dwellings as their income or circumstances dictated.

Even relatively small towns could boast of suburbs, or at least the term ‘suburb’ was being used as a positive signifier in advertisements, as in the case of the two houses and building ground being sold in 1868 at Lewisville: ‘a beautifully situated and fashionable watering place in the suburbs of Youghal (pop. 7,486 in 1871), comprising over 30 handsome detached villa residences’. [24] In this case, there was a seasonal aspect as these dwellings could command high rents when furnished during the summer and autumn months. Transport was also an important factor, as the Youghal terminus of the Cork, Youghal and Queenstown Railway adjoined Lewisville.[25] In fact, proximity to the train was expected to yield more visitors than actually transpired, leading to the bankruptcy of the developers in this case.[26] This is a further reminder of the rather precarious nature of the speculative development process in the nineteenth century.

For Irish country towns, improved housing, most typically located at the edges, became a feature from the second half of the nineteenth century. Freeman observed many dwellings of the ‘two-up, two-down’ variety which were built through private speculation along the country roads near the town, while ‘new quarters’ were built with state assistance to rehouse those living in inadequate slums. Further, the ‘well-to-do of the country towns generally established themselves in smart new labour-saving houses somewhere outside the town’.[27] All of these processes resulted in the loss of the compact mid-nineteenth century town. By the 1950s, then, ‘ribbon development’ had been rampant for more than a century, with spreads of houses to be found along the roads outside the main nucleus of the town.

Throughout the nineteenth century, common tropes of suburban living become evident in the advertisements of estate agents. These include not just the individual qualities of the dwelling itself, such as the presence of hot and cold running water or a gas supply, or of its location, with proximity to the tram being seen as a major virtue, but also financial considerations – in Cork, the fact that a dwelling was ‘outside city taxation’ was mentioned, and more generally the fact that the dwellings were ‘let to solvent tenants’, but also that the locality was healthy and desirable ‘in the nicest suburb’[28]. Only industrial Belfast could boast of large-scale working-class suburbanisation akin to that of booming Manchester or Liverpool, with their red-brick two-up, two-down terraces of ‘bye-law’ housing at relatively high densities, in distinct areas which were socially and spatially segregated by class. Elsewhere, suburbs were the domain of the upper and middle-classes.

Twentieth-century 'democratisation' of Irish suburbs

Whereas the nineteenth century can be seen as the era when the suburb became a desirable middle-class haven from the various perceived ills (both physical and moral) of the city, the twentieth century was the time when suburbs came to dominate housing provision for all classes of society. This emergence was inextricably tied to the influence of the garden city movement in the early decades of the century, which was gradually codified through the Housing Manual (1919), and its Irish equivalent, and became national policy – although this must be inferred rather than having been explicitly stated. [29]

By the early twentieth century suburban living began to be seen as an option for the working classes as well as their social betters, although it should be noted that this was commonly suggested by well-intentioned middle-class reformers rather than being voiced by the 'lower orders' themselves. Thus, it was generally held by reformers that the perceived ills of the urban environment, with its overcrowded and unhealthy slum housing – a feature not just of the large cities but also of far smaller urban areas in Ireland[30]– could be solved by removing the population from such unhealthy surroundings to newly-built single-family housing on virgin soil, preferably in high and healthy surroundings at the city's edge where they could benefit from the fresh air of the countryside. The impetus for rehousing and the gradual acceptance that the state and/or local authorities would have to intervene in order to address the housing problem became closely associated with the garden city movement which reached its zenith in the early decades of the twentieth century.

As has been well documented elsewhere, there was a strong tide in favour of suburbanisation of the working classes in Dublin in particular. In this case, there was a practical argument to be made, since the scale of housing needed for the 30,000 people who urgently required rehousing according to the 1913 inquiry could never be accommodated on existing urban sites. In evidence presented to the inquiry, experts including pioneering town planner Patrick Geddes argued in favour of planned suburbanisation, a conclusion which was reached by the commissioners appointed to undertake the inquiry. [31] However, despite these strong voices in favour of suburbanisation, there was an ongoing debate within Dublin Corporation as to the relative merits of suburban rather than central sites. Not everyone was happy with the suggestion that the population should be decanted from existing communities, with arguments – which in hindsight proved justified – that the additional costs incurred by new residents in commuting to the city for work would be problematic, while there would be a loss of vitality in the city centre. Tom Kelly, long-time chairman of the Corporation's housing committee and himself a former tenement dweller, was a strong advocate of building

housing for the people within their existing communities.[32] Nevertheless, the majority of housing schemes undertaken in the early years of the Free State were built on suburban greenfield sites. Marino on the northside of Dublin, the most influential of these, was deliberately intended as a model for others – including private builders - to follow, and included a variety of house types and building materials to lend texture and interest to the estate. More significantly, a degree of social diversity was encouraged by the decision to reserve areas on the main road frontages of the scheme for private developers who could afford to build more expensive houses. This 'reserved areas' policy was subsequently pursued by the Corporation at its other schemes, including Drumcondra, Larkfield and Kimmage[33], thereby belying the general perception that problematic one-class estates were the inevitable outcome of local authority housing provision.

Despite some reservations and debate, from the 1920s and increasingly in the 1930s state intervention in housing took the form of suburban housing. The style of 'council' dwellings also changed, from the typical narrow one- and two-storey terraces opening directly onto the street which characterised early schemes, to wider garden city-inspired layouts which included gardens front and rear, again emphasising the benefits of light and air, as well as the opportunities for growing one's own vegetables.[34] These new post-World War I housing standards represented a major shift from previous norms, stressing that both aesthetic and practical considerations should be taken into account in the layout of new estates on 'garden suburb' lines. A low-density layout was favoured, based on an 'appropriate' housing density of 12 houses to the acre (*c*.30 per hectare) in suburban locations, while open spaces and playgrounds were also required to account for at least ten percent of the gross housing area. The style of council houses across the state was greatly influenced by the five volume series of model house plans provided in the mid-1920s by the Department of Local Government.[35] The standardised and characteristic form of these council houses can be identified at suburban locations across Ireland. Distinctive examples include the 'new town in miniature' at St Joseph's Park, Nenagh (completed 1936) or Tullamore's O'Molloy Street scheme (opened by Minister O'Kelly in 1938), but they can be found at the outskirts of virtually every town in the country, thanks to the Trojan slum-clearance efforts of the 1930s and further phases of suburban council housing in the 1950s.[36]

If Irish suburbs lost their exclusivity in the twentieth century, they also became part of a process of state building. Kincaid suggests that both politicians and planners of the new state were middle class in their outlook and saw suburbs as capable of promoting values such

as property ownership, self-reliance and financial frugality among the working class population. [37] Housing was also an instrument demonstrating the state's ability to improve lives, by providing construction-related jobs as well as clearing the slums.

Under tenant purchase schemes, home ownership was brought within the reach of the working classes, at a time when the majority of suburban residents were still renters. The Housing Acts of 1924 and 1925 also promoted private house building which, when combined with the provisions of the existing Small Dwellings Acquisitions Acts, made owner occupation a feasible option for an increasing proportion of the lower middle-class population. Of course the shift in housing tenure during the course of the twentieth century affected all types of housing, wherever it was located, but as suburban development became increasingly dominant, its impacts were most clearly felt in the newly emerging suburbs. The trend towards low-density suburban housing intensified throughout the twentieth century. Many of the new suburbanites were rural migrants experiencing both pull and push factors, either coming to work in the civil service or abandoning uneconomic farm holdings, while others were the rehoused inner-city population who often had mixed feelings about their new surroundings.

The middle-class suburbs in smaller towns and cities were close to the city centres, yet were still clearly separated from working class areas. Because land was cheaper in the smaller towns, housing densities were lower and the middle classes could often readily afford detached housing. Elsewhere, private speculative suburbs generally favoured the semi-detached design.[38] Over time, a standard form, or 'universal plan', emerged. There were usually two ground floor reception rooms, often with sliding doors between them, as well as a kitchen and scullery, while upstairs there were three, or sometimes four, bedrooms, a bathroom and separate toilet. There was often a separate toilet in an outhouse to the rear. Such a plan was used in Irish suburban homes from the 1920s until at least the 1960s, while more recent variations retain the general layout but merge the separate bath and W.C. and, from the early 21st century, include 'en suite' facilities for the master bedroom. From the 1920s, when the garden suburb approach was first adopted for local authority houses, builders differentiated the private suburban homes which they constructed from their local authority counterparts in a variety of ways. Two typical features were the provision of a garage and of bay windows to one or both storeys. Both were included in the new semi-detached homes on Church Road, Nenagh, which were advertised in 1929. Characteristic of the era, the advertisement noted that these dwellings had two reception rooms, five bedrooms, a kitchen, scullery, pantry and garage, with 'up-to-date sanitation' including 2 w.c.'s and hot and cold water, as well as a plot of

ground to the front and garden at the rear.[39] This description was typical of the standard private semi-detached home which had now emerged. Government building grants, combined with the loan facilities made available under the Small Dwellings Acquisition Acts, encouraged owner occupation during the 1920s. Builders in the main urban centres were erecting suburban estates by the 1930s, such as Dublin's 'Butterfield Estate', 'Hampstead Hill Estate', 'Mount Merrion' and many other quite large scale developments. The scale of undertakings was, unsurprisingly, considerably smaller in Ireland's provincial towns and, as noted previously, detached suburban dwellings were more common. Although developers and purchasers were at pains to retain social cachet by distinguishing their houses from those provided by the local authorities, ironically the standard of design and layout was often of a higher quality in the latter.

Suburbs after 1950

By mid-century, the decanting of the population from central areas to newly emerging suburbs was an established practice not just for the middle classes but for all members of society. Its increasing importance is clear from the fact that the 1956 census marked the first time that 'official Ireland' took notice of suburbanisation, by publishing details of the population of 'suburbs or environs' of Irish cities and towns.[40] Despite the fact that the Irish population as a whole was in decline, with the 1950s marking an emigration peak for the 20th century, the suburbs of towns and cities were growing significantly. Ireland's total population in 1956 was just 2.8 million. Some 1.1 million of these were defined as living in towns or cities, the smallest of which fell into the 500 to 1,000 population range, while a further 147,738 lived in suburbs beyond the legally defined boundaries. This number is undoubtedly an underestimation, given that several towns on the list did not have a legally defined boundary, or had limits which were extensive and therefore 'suburban type' development was occurring within these limits.[41] Nevertheless, even within the inadequacies of the data, the fact that by 2011 almost 1 million people were legally defined as living in the suburbs or environs of Irish towns of 1,500 population and over, indicates the vast significance of the suburb to Irish life and the Irish people.

It was not until the 1950s that mass car ownership made it possible for the suburbs to grow at ever increasing distances from the core. In the bigger urban areas, housing had already moved outwards, but now other activities started to follow the population in its outward movement, including new offices, factories and the first shopping centres (with Stillorgan in Dublin (1966) followed by others around the country). It could be argued that,

as well as their impact on the physical environment, these interconnected changes had a profound impact on social interaction. Public transport was less and less able to cater for an increasingly dispersed population, with individuals therefore becoming more dependent on their cars. The car-dominated suburbs which characterised the later twentieth century had an insidious longer-term impact on the city centre. As people, jobs and services moved to the suburbs, dereliction and decline were experienced in the centre. This fate was most obvious in larger cities, especially Dublin, but the on-going suburbanisation of retailing in particular has blighted the main streets of many smaller towns.

This mass suburbanisation from the mid-1950s did not necessarily imply increased social mixing. In general, the private speculatively-developed middle-class suburbs avoided the location of new social housing suburbs provided by the city authorities, although some efforts at mixing arose through the application of a 'reserved areas' policy typically at the edges of the new 'schemes'. One of the most celebrated social housing schemes in the state, and its only high-rise suburb, was completed in Ballymun in the 1960s. Initially lauded as a positive new approach to slum clearance, structural problems quickly emerged with Ballymun's system-built flat buildings, while subsequent social problems blighted what was, and remains, an area with a strong community spirit. Meanwhile, the late 1960s also saw the adoption of a 'New Towns' policy advocated by planning consultant Miles Wright. Despite the plans to develop 'new towns' at Tallaght, Blanchardstown, Lucan and Clondalkin, these never achieved a sense of separation from the city and the ultimate result was an exacerbation of the suburbanising effect around Dublin.

During the 1970s, the Republic of Ireland experienced population growth due to natural increase and to net in-migration for the first time in over a century. While this growth was widespread throughout the state, the highest rates of increase were evident in towns along the main routeways out of Dublin, Cork and Limerick. These changes were part of a new phase of suburbanisation, which saw an increase in commuting patterns and in the widening spheres of influence of the major cities, particularly Dublin, on their hinterland. Thus suburban housing estates clearly targeted at Dublin-based workers began to be built in Lucan, Naas, Maynooth, Celbridge, Malahide etc., a process which both intensified and spread to a greater distance during the so-called Celtic Tiger era. Suburban overspill was a clear factor in growth during the 1970s and 1980s, resulting in a redistribution of population between town and suburban areas, particularly in the larger county boroughs such as Dublin and Limerick.[42] While this suburban redistribution could be seen as the inevitable outcome of half a century of slum clearance policies as well as middle-class choice, it was also reflective

of international trends of the 1970s, when many developed countries experienced inner-city decline and suburban expansion. Large-scale central dereliction in the larger cities and towns was addressed by a series of property-based urban renewal policies from the mid-1980s. This led to the development of private apartments in central areas on a large scale for the first time, thereby introducing a new element to Ireland's housing equation. Nevertheless, continued suburban expansion, including the increase in urban-generated housing development located in the countryside rather than more 'traditional' suburban locations, attracted significant criticism and calls for more stringent regulation.[43] The 'bungalow suburbs festooning the approach roads', particularly since the 1960s , were destroying the historic integrity of many of the older centres, while scattered housing along the roadsides also blurred the distinctiveness between town and country [44]

In the smaller towns around Ireland, as previously noted, middle-class suburban housing was less likely to take the form of estate houses until the 1980s or even 1990s, and instead the long-standing practise of erection of single-family bungalows or sometimes two-storey dwellings in ribbon development was continued; therefore, not much changed over the course of a century. They were likely to be individually differentiated, even where a number were erected at the same time. It can be suggested that this preference was a means of continuing to differentiate themselves from the identical council houses provided in relatively large-scale estates.

Celtic Tiger Boom, Bust and the 'Celtic Phoenix': 21st century suburban change

During the so-called 'Celtic Tiger' era, the suburbs took on new forms as soaring land prices encouraged developers to increase housing densities and introduce apartments into the housing mix. In addition to these design changes, the location of suburban housing estates changed. With a decline in affordability in the traditional suburbs, aspiring residents resigned themselves to increasingly long commuting distances and, in order to attain the goal of an owner occupied family home, bought new houses in heretofore unthinkable locations. The functional relationship between more distant locations and the urban core has shifted. New suburban-style housing estates have been marketed at Dublin commuters in distant locations (such as Rochfortbridge in Westmeath, Gorey and Bunclody in Wexford and Castlecomer in Kilkenny), including development of schemes in small villages that have not previously experienced large amounts of construction. Examples includes Clonard, Stamullen and Ballivor (Meath), Carbury and Prosperous (Kildare), Aughrim and Baltinglass (Wicklow),

Kinnegad (Westmeath) and Collon (Louth). While the economic boom continued, these distant suburbs remained viable, because there was a continuing demand for homes and many owners planned to 'trade up' to better locations in the future. With the move to provide suburban commuter dwellings at locations increasingly further from Dublin, counties in 'outer Leinster' (i.e. Louth, Westmeath, Offaly, Laois, Carlow and Wexford) increasingly became integrated into the Dublin Commuter Belt. For example, significant population growth in Courtown, Co. Wexford, was not matched by local economic growth but rather driven by commuters working in Dublin, 100km away. However, one of the many unenviable consequences of the bust after 2008 was the fact that new residents became 'trapped' by negative equity in poorly-located housing estates, some of which were incomplete. These unfinished and 'ghost' estates became a symbol of the bust.

The combination of suburbanisation and ex-urban development around Ireland's cities, and most particularly around Dublin, has created sprawl-type settlement with almost total dependency on the private car. [45] Due to the nature of the suburban life-cycle, whereby families typically move in to newly-completed estates at similar stages in their life paths and require the same types of services (from pre-schools to health-care facilities) simultaneously, as even relatively modern suburbs such as parts of Tallaght, Blanchardstown and Templeogue experience population loss, there is a potential under-utilisation of social infrastructure.

The housing boom of the early twenty-first century saw increasing blurring of the boundaries between urban and rural identities, in what might be termed 'rurbanisation', with the spread of suburban-style housing estates to rural locations. Although they replicate the housing found in 'traditional' suburban estates, their location in far more rural locations is a recent phenomenon which has significant social and landscape impacts. For example, the residents of the many estates which grew around the hamlet of Robinstown in Co. Meath were promised 'all the benefits of rural living, yet… close to the main thoroughfares that will bring them to the major urban centres'.[46] Such 'rural suburbs', made possible by the improved road network of recent years, offer a more affordable solution to people who have been priced out of the housing market in the main cities and their existing suburbs, but raise questions of social and economic sustainability.

Conclusion

The Irish suburb is rather more complex, both historically and geographically, than is generally appreciated, and our understanding of the suburban phenomenon is as yet very incomplete. While in the present day suburbs are occupied by all classes of society and increasingly by owner occupiers, this has not always been the case. Over time, the perceived desirability of a suburban location shifted, while forms of tenure changed from the predominance of rental towards owner occupation. The pattern whereby suburbs became desirable middle-class residences in the nineteenth century and then the mass form of housing for all classes, associated with car ownership, in the twentieth, is common across the Western world. However, Ireland is not simply the same as everywhere else, there are nuances in the Irish suburban story which relate to a particular combination of social, cultural and political forces. In 1965, Pfretzschner wrote of the Irish 'obsession for the land' which explained, in his view, the preference for houses over flats, and for ownership over rental.[47] The typical Irish home, therefore, was the one or two-storey single or semi-detached cottage with a garden – the stereotypical suburban type for both private owners and local authority tenants. These cultural factors, with the very deep-rooted preference for single-family homes, general avoidance of multiple occupancy flat/apartments, and emphasis on ownership, have combined with the particularly uneven nature of urbanization in Ireland, with Dublin as the primate city and a network of small towns, to produce the particular pattern of suburban development outlined above. It is also worth reiterating that what makes it 'suburban' is not necessarily to do with urban form or house design, which tends to differ over time and across space. Instead, the state of mind of those who chose to inhabit these dwellings is perhaps the best indicator of what makes an Irish suburb.

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[1] The available research on Irish suburbs includes individual studies of specific locations, such as James H. Johnson's early study of Glengormley, and work by local historians. A relatively small number of individual scholars, including the sociology research cluster at Maynooth University including Mary Corcoran, Jane Gray and Michel Peillon, and geographers Joseph Brady and Ruth McManus, have published scholarly work on the suburbs. The emphasis has generally been on the evolution of Dublin's suburbs, see for example Ó Maitiú and Daly, with limited attention paid to the rest of the country. See: James H. Johnson, 'The Geography of a Belfast Suburb', *Irish Geography* 3.3 (1956), 150-161; Mary E. Daly *Dublin The Deposed Capital: A Social and Economic History 1860-1914* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1984); Ruth McManus, *Dublin, 1910-1940: Shaping the City and Suburbs* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002); Seamus Ó Maitiú. *Dublin's suburban towns 1834-1930* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003); Mary P. Corcoran, Jane Gray, J. and Michel Peillon, *Suburban Affiliations: social relations in the Greater Dublin Area*. (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010); and Joseph Brady, *Dublin 1930-1950, the Emergence of the Modern City* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014) and *Dublin 1950-1970, houses, flats and high-rise*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2016).

[2] See the definitional discussion in Ruth McManus and Philip J. Ethington, 'Suburbs in transition: new approaches to suburban history', *Urban History*. 34.2 (2007), 317-337, especially 319-20.
[3] According to Andrews, suburbs 'were regarded by tradition as socially inferior to town-centres; extramural dwellings might also give the impression of a community unable to protect all its members', hence the suburb was 'censored out of existence'. John. H. Andrews, 'Classifying Early Irish Town Plans', in *Surveying Ireland's Past: Multidisciplinary Essays in Honour of Anngret Simms*, ed. by Howard B. Clarke, Jacinta Prunty, and Mark Hennessy. (Dublin: Geography Publications, 2004), pp. 217-242 (p.231).
[4] An associated phenomenon was squatting on common land, with squatters found on patches of common land immediately outside towns (i.e. effectively suburban locations) such as Rathnew, Co. Wicklow, Callan, Co. Kilkenny, Kilmallock, Co. Limerick. See Thomas W. Freeman, *Pre-Famine Ireland, a Study in Historical Geography*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1957), p. 5, 20.
[5] William M. Thackeray, *The Irish Sketchbook*, the 1990 reprint Edition (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1843), p. 299; S.C. Hall and A. M. Hall, *Hall's Ireland, Mr & Mrs Hall's Tour of 1840, Ed. by Michael Scott*, the 1984 condensed edition (London: Sphere Books, 1984) ,p. 393.
[6] Thomas.W Freeman, 'The Irish Country Town', *Irish Geography* 3.1 (1954), 5-14 (p.10). Another example of the 'outcast' element of early suburbs can perhaps be seen in the designation of an 'Irishtown' in many locations which was generally an area on the outskirts of the town where the poorer, Roman Catholic elements of society remained segregated from those in power. This links to the siting of the Catholic church which often gravitated to the fair green or commonage site, physically as well as symbolically having only squatter's rights. See Kevin Whelan, 'The Catholic Parish, the Catholic Chapel and Village Development in Ireland', *Irish Geography* 16.1 (1983), 1-15 (p.10).Examples include Ardfinnan (Tipperary), Curraheen (Kerry), Keeraunmore (Galway), fair greens at Mullagh (Clare), Feakle (Clare), and Portumna (Galway)
[7] See Diarmuid Ó. Gráda, *Georgian Dublin, the forces that shaped the city* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2015). The importance of such villas is discussed in greater detail in 'Urban Environment and Housing', in *Art and Architecture of Ireland Volume*, ed. by Andrew Carpenter and others, 5 vols, (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2015), IV, 426-28.< www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14jxtzk.20.> [Accessed 12 July 2017]
[8]The western hill centred on Ballybricken had a pronounced working-class ethos, while merchant villas erected on mini-demesnes on the north bank of the River Suir, situated on the dissolved monastic estate of Kilculliheen, formed a villa belt which resisted subdivision and suburbanization until the mid-twentieth century. See Jack Burtchaell, 'Waterford', in *Art and Architecture of Ireland*, IV, p. 474.
[9] Francis M.L. Thompson, 'Introduction: the rise of suburbia', in *The rise of suburbia*, ed. by Francis.M.L Thompson (Leicester: Leicester University Press/St Martin's Press, 1982), p. 2.
[10] Academics have also questioned the validity of studying the suburbs at all: 'Suburban life has traditionally been a target for vilification, its architecture an object of derision'. Helena Barrett and John Phillips, *Suburban Style: The British House 1840-1960* (New York: Little, Brown, 1993), p. 7.

[11] Richard Harris, 'Meaningful Types in a World of Suburbs', in *Suburbanisation in a Global Society*, ed. by Mark Clapson and Ray Hutchison, Research in Urban Sociology, 10 (Bingley: Emerald Group publishing. 2010), pp.15 - 47
[12] *Suburban Urbanities: Suburbs and the Life of the High Street*, ed. by Laura Vaughan, (London: UCL Press, 2015)
[13] Mumford, Lewis. *The Culture of Cities* (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1938/1970), p. 215.

[14] See discussion in Arthur M. Edwards, *The Design of Suburbia: A Critical Study in Environmental History* (London: Pembridge Press, 1981), p. 33.
[15] For further explanation, see: Pamela Lofthouse, 'The Development of English Semi-Detached Dwellings during the Nineteenth Century', *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology*, 22 (2013), 83-98.
[16] Friedrich Engels described the residential segregation of Manchester with its working people's quarters 'stretching like a girdle… around the commercial district', whereas the upper and middle bourgeoisie had moved to suburbs beyond this girdle: 'the middle bourgeoisie in regularly laid out streets… the upper bourgeoisie in remoter villas with gardens… in free, wholesome country air, in fine, comfortable homes, passed once every half or quarter hour by omnibuses going into the city'. Friedrich Engels, 'The Great Towns', in *The City Reader*, ed. by Richard.T. LeGates and Frederic. Stout (London, Routledge: 1996), pp.46-54 (p. 49.).
[17] For further discussion, see *Changing Suburbs: Foundation, Form and Function*, ed. by Richard Harris and Peter J. Larkham (London, Routledge, 1999), and Larry S. Bourne, 'Reinventing the Suburbs: Old Myths and New Realities', *Progress in Planning* 46.3 (1996) 163-84.
[18] See Daly and Ó Maitiú.
[19] Stefan Muthesius, *The English terraced house* (London: BCA, 1982), p.99.

[20] See Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Norton, 1992)
[21] Lofthouse, pp. 83 – 98.
[22] H.J. Dyos, Victorian Suburb, a study of the growth of Camberwell (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1961), pp. 23-4; Susan Galavan, *Dublin's Bourgeois Homes, Building the Victorian Suburbs, 1850-1901* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 5-6.
[23] An early example from *The Cork Examiner*, 14 October 1874, p. 1, states 'House wanted in the suburbs, before the end of November. Must have at least 3 bedrooms and 2 sitting rooms. Rent not to exceed £30. St. Luke's or Sunday's Well preferred'. In *The Irish Times*, 8 April 1880, p. 8, the prospective tenant sought a large house with stables in 'Monkstown, Glenageary or neighbourhood', while one wonders at the specific requirements of the advertiser in the *Irish Times*, 9 August 1900, p. 8, who sought a 'gentleman's residence within quarter hour of tram or train, either Booterstown, Blackrock or Dundrum; must have five good bedrooms, two or three sitting rooms, hot water, stabling, either no land or four acres'.
[24] AIRO Cork Historical Mapping Tool, <http://airo.maynoothuniversity.ie/external-content/population-change-1841-2002-cork> [accessed14 June 2016]
[25] University College Dublin Digital Library has an 1877 1:500 (i.e. 10 foot) map of Youghal in sections; 27 and 29 are most relevant to Lewisville: <https://digital.ucd.ie/view-media/ucdlib:40496/none#daacda97-3d17-4b56-b9d2-c720a2b4efc0> [accessed 12 June 2017]
[26] The auction of the property due to the bankruptcy of Henry Thomas and Son was advertised in *The Cork Examiner* of 18 March 1868, p. 1. Reference is also made to the circumstances of the bankruptcy in the National Inventory of Irish Architectural Heritage. <http://www.buildingsofireland.ie/niah/search.jsp?type=record&county=CO®no=20823282)> [accessed 12 June 2017]
[27] Freeman, 'The Irish Country Town', p. 10
[28] A brief selection of advertisements from 1888 gives a flavour of the typical features which were in favour. The *Belfast Newsletter*, 9 June 1888, p. 2 listed 'Massie Villas, Bloomfield; 3 reception, 5 bedrooms; hot and cold water; near train and tram; immediate possession', while the *Freeman's Journal*, 3 July 1888, p. 1 offered 'Accommodation: 4 roomed house with scullery, out offices, w.c., garden front and rere, perfect sewerage; splendid position; healthy and cheerful. No 7 Lismore Terrace, Drumcondra; rent £18 yearly.' As most houses were rented, it was important for the lessor to attract the 'right sort' of tenant, as is evident in the advertisement from the *Cork Examiner*, 3 October 1888, p. 1 offering a 'splendid view' and 'every accommodation for a respectable family' at 2 Clifton Villas, Montenotte. The mention of being 'in the nicest suburb' comes from an advertisement for 16 Myrtle Hill Terrace, *Cork Examiner*, 20 July 1908, p. 1. One of many examples of property listed as being 'let to solvent tenants' appears in the listing for 1-18 St. Patrick's Terrace and Woodview, Douglas Road, in the *Cork Examiner* on 31 August 1912, p. 4. As early as 1865, building plots on Boreenmanah Road were being advertised as being 'free from city taxation' and 'admirably adapted for building neat terrace houses which are now so much required in the suburbs of Cork', *Cork Examiner*, 10 April 1865, p. 1.
[29] In anticipation of post-war housing shortages, a British parliamentary committee chaired by Sir John Tudor Walters, MP, produced a report on housing provision, including construction and design standards. Their recommendations were adopted by the Local Government Board which produced a manual on the preparation of state-aided housing schemes (better known as the Housing Manual) in 1919. A smaller equivalent for Ireland, entitled *Housing of the working classes in Ireland*, provided plans for site layout and for different house types, using lower densities, wider house frontages to enhance natural sunlight, fixed baths and a standard of two living-rooms and three bedrooms of stated minimum sizes.
[30] Appalling conditions in Dublin were highlighted in an inquiry published in 1914, whose appendices also revealed shocking circumstances in the smaller provincial towns. *Report of the departmental committee appointed . . . to inquire into the housing conditions of the working classes in the city of Dublin: evidence and appendices*, H.C. 1914 (7317), xix, appendix xxxvii, pp. 382-393. Widespread, severe overcrowding and the presence of one-roomed dwellings was revealed by the census returns for 1911 and 1926. Among the towns affected were Newbridge, Co. Kildare, Edenderry, Co. Offaly, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath and Ballinasloe, Co. Galway.
[31] The public inquiry into the housing conditions of the working classes in Dublin, undertaken by the Local Government Board for Ireland in late 1913, heard evidence from 76 witnesses over 16 days.
[32] See discussion in Ruth McManus, 'Lord Mayor Laurence O'Neill, Alderman Tom Kelly and Dublin's housing crisis' in *Leaders of the City*, ed. by Ruth McManus and Lisa-Marie Griffith (Dublin: Four Courts, 2013), pp. 141-151.
[33] See discussions in Ruth McManus, *Dublin 1910-1940*, and Joseph Brady, *Dublin 1950-1970.*.
[34] The contrast is evident between the schemes at Dublin's Church Street and the later layouts and house styles at Marino, Drumcondra or Fairbrother's Fields, for example. Similar shifts can be seen between the terraced council housing at St Muredach's Terrace (1916) and St Mary's Villa's (1924), both in Ballina, Co. Mayo.

[35] Ministry of Local Government. *House designs prescribed by the minister for local government under the Housing Act, 1924*. Dublin: Stationery Office, 1925.
[36] For a more complete discussion of the schemes undertaken at Nenagh, see Ruth McManus, 'A new town in miniature, inter-war suburban housing in an Irish provincial town' *2ha*. 8 (2014), 2-4.
[37] Andrew Kincaid, *Post-Colonial Dublin: imperial legacies and the built environment*. (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p.82.
[38]Lofthouse has traced the origin and trajectory of the semi-detached plan, as it evolved and became adopted as the norm for suburban housing. Although often considered to be a twentieth-century invention, the semi-detached house was used for rural cottages for the working classes (for cost reduction and heat-containing purposes) and suburban villas for the middle classes during the nineteenth century. ' Although the semi-detached form had followed very different paths up and down the social scales in the city and the country, semis as villas were the dwelling type of choice for the middle classes in the suburbs and semis as double cottages housed the working classes in the country. This set the scene for the garden city movement and the post-war public housing regime which arose from it. These twentieth century phenomena were at last able to move the semi down to the urban working classes', 2012, p. 97. See also Finn Jensen, *The English Semi-Detached House: how and Why the Semi Became Britain's most Popular House-Type* (Penryn, Cornwall: Red Planet, 2007).
[39] *Nenagh Guardian*, 23 March 1929, p. 2.
[40] See Table 13 of the 1956 Census of Population (CSO), p. 138, 'Population of towns by type of district' which listed the population of 'suburbs or environs' as well as the population within the legally defined boundary for towns categorised by size bands. While there are many issues with this somewhat vague definition, the fact that the Central Statistics Office saw the necessity of providing information for 'suburbs or environs' gives an indication of its perceived importance.
[41] The problematic nature of these data can best be illustrated by the fact that the city of Galway has no 'scheduled suburbs' prior to the 1990s, despite the significant degree of suburbanisation which it had undergone in the previous thirty years.

[42] Mary Cawley, 'Town Population Change 1971–1986: Patterns and Distributional Effects.' *Irish Geography* 24.2 (1991) 106-16, see especially 113.
[43] See discussion in Berna Grist, 'Planning', in *Local Government in Ireland*, ed. by Mark Callanan and Justin F. Keogan (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2003), pp. 221 – 253.
[44] *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape*, ed. by Frederick H. A. Aalen, Kevin Whelan, and Matthew Stout. (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), p. 149, 241. These houses were generally, though not exclusively, bungalows which were based on pattern-book designs, particularly those which appeared in Jack Fitzsimon's highly successful 'Bungalow Bliss' design book. Typical bungalows were of concrete block construction 1,500-2,500 square feet in floor area, with a rectangular footprint and a pitched roof on a half acre to one acre plot. Strings of single-storey houses were built along the roadsides close to small towns, forming the classic ribbon development.
[45] These themes have been explored in a number of publications, including the following: B. Williams, and P. Shiels 'Acceleration into sprawl: Causes and Potential Policy Responses,' Quarterly Economic Commentary, ESRI, June 2000, 37-62; B. Williams., B. Hughes, and P. Shiels. *Urban Sprawl and Market Fragmentation in the Greater Dublin Area*. (Dublin: Society of Chartered Surveyors, 2007); B. Caulfield. & A. Ahern. 'The green fields of Ireland: The legacy of Dublin's housing boom and the impact on commuting' *Case Studies on Transport Policy* 2(1). (2014) 20–27.

[46] Tom Kelly, 'Old and new in Robinstown' *Meath Chronicle* 15 March 2008.
<http://www.meathchronicle.ie/whatson/reviews/articles/2008/03/15/23765-old-and-new-in-robinstown>
[Accessed 14 July 2017].
[47] P.A. Pfretzschner, *The Dynamics of Irish Housing* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1965), p. 112.