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Letter from the Editors

Opolis is the first academic journal specifically focused on suburban studies. Suburbs increasingly dominate urban development throughout the world. Over half the population of the United States now lives in suburbs, and recent metropolitan growth in Europe, Australia, and East Asia has shifted dramatically to the metropolitan edges. Even many developing nations—long home to big “primate cities”—have experienced explosive suburban growth. Yet suburbia remains an under-researched topic given its size, scale, and centrality to society.

Opolis may be new, but the ideas shared here are old ones looking for a new home. Core cities have had satellite communities for many centuries. We have just started calling these satellites “suburbs.” Yet the term suburb is not useful anymore—it conveys that it is subordinate to the core city. In fact, the core city and what we term suburbs have created a new metropolitan complex of communities, and, in some cases, have larger economies and more diverse populations than their core cities.

We have entered a new era where the areas outside foreign core cities are now forming different settlement systems. China and India, with fast-growing middle classes, are witnessing a startling expansion of their urban areas with rapid growth on the fringe that is auto-dependent. Mexico, Indonesia, and many Asian urban areas are beginning to resemble American-style suburban patterns. In Europe, even tight building controls have not curbed the appetite of households to move out of the central cities. As urban form changes, new research and policy has to be crafted to meet the challenges. This new journal is in response to that challenge.

Much of the existing literature demonizes the suburbs and attributes to them an endless array of social and environmental problems. *Opolis* covers all dimensions of suburbia: the good, the bad, and (as the cliché goes) the ugly. It especially invites articles that explore suburbs on their own terms and not as intrinsically inferior places to cities. In that spirit, *Opolis* also seeks new ways of understanding suburbia—including analysis that rethinks the roles that cities and suburbs play in the region. Thus, the journal encompasses metropolitan studies writ large.

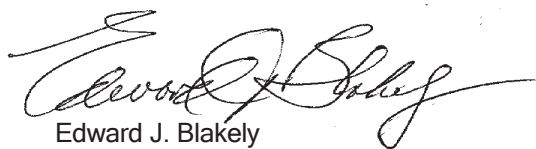
Opolis's audience includes policy makers, practitioners, and scholars in planning, public policy, environmental science, and real estate development. The journal also covers topics of interest to architects, economists, geographers, political scientists, sociologists, and urban designers.

In our first issue Robert E. Lang, one of the editors, sets the tone of *Opolis* with his article titled “Valuing the Suburbs.” By referring to econometric analysis of suburban home sales, Lang shows that not all home improvements are equal, and in fact some may actually devalue a house. In general, features that add to a property’s “urban intensity” can lower the sales price of single-family detached suburban homes, including adding such seemingly innocent improvements as fences and sidewalks. The analysis shows how difficult it will be to build at greater density in the suburbs because even improvements that help generate

income, such as granny flats and professional offices, often—ironically—reduce home values. The next article, “Philadelphia’s Space In Between,” by Nancey Green Leigh and Sugie Lee from Georgia Tech, looks at the evolution of inner suburbs. The piece illustrates the “unequalness” of suburban development as the older suburbs struggle and decline while newer areas thrive. Leigh and Lee confirm earlier findings from researchers such as Myron Orfield that inner-ring suburbs are increasingly vulnerable to socio-economic decline and exhibit symptoms of decline similar to those found in inner cities. This is an especially compelling article given that, according to the most recent American Community Survey, the number of people now living below poverty in US suburbs nearly equals the number in the central cities. By 2010, the suburban poverty figure is projected to surpass the urban one. The future face of American poverty is clearly a suburban one.

While Lang’s work covers mostly white suburbs that resist building more densely, an article by California State Senator Robert Mendez offers an insight into an alternative market, or what he terms “Latino New Urbanism.” He shows that most Latino newcomers to California go directly to suburbs and bypass central cities—the traditional home to most new immigrants. The main point of Mendez’s article is that Latinos’ cultural acceptance of densely built cities provides an opportunity to build more compact suburbs.

The final article by Bill Randolph and Darren Holloway from the University of Sydney covers “The Suburbanization of Disadvantage in Sydney.” As in the US, Australia’s suburbs have become remarkably diverse places in recent years. As Randolph and Holloway observe, “the most important social trend” is the transition of moderately affluent post-World War II suburbs into “disadvantaged” communities. They further note that “The key change is that the inner cities are no longer the location of urban disadvantage in Sydney—this honor has shifted to the middle [or post war] suburbs.” This same generation of American suburb, according to many researchers including Leigh and Lee, is now at substantial risk for decline as well.



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