

The future of the suburbs

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Few living environments are more universally maligned than the suburbs. The suburbs stand accused of being boring, homogeneous, inefficient, car-oriented, and sterile. Some critics even argue that the suburbs make people fat. While criticisms mount, however, a large proportion of the world's population continues to live in the suburban fringes of growing cities. This Interface asks: What factors will affect the future of the suburbs? What changes do planners need to accommodate in planning the next generation of urban growth?

In the latest issue of *Planning Theory & Practice*, Arthur C. Nelson presents a compelling case that the future of [suburbs](#) in the United States will be quite different to the last century of growth. The 20th century American suburb featured sprawling residential development on large lots with increasingly large homes. As the population ages, however, and as household dynamics and preferences change, Nelson predicts that suburbs will become denser, better connected, and more mixed in use. In light of emerging trends Nelson describes a resettlement movement to fringe areas that he believes will replicate the urbanity of town centres. The fate of older sprawling suburbs with their big houses may present planners with significant challenges if housing demand shifts to smaller homes in urban areas in the way that Nelson envisions.

Given the influence of American practice on global planning, practitioners elsewhere will be interested to track trends and projections in that part of the world. Four commentaries by internationally recognised scholars and practitioners discuss the implications of Nelson's predictions and consider the application of his ideas in the global

context.

While the suburbs undoubtedly have a future, city planners are always wise to prepare for new kinds of demands as [population](#) characteristics and needs change.

More information: Grant, J. et al. *Planning Theory & Practice*, Volume 14, Issue 3, 2013. www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14649357.2013.808833

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