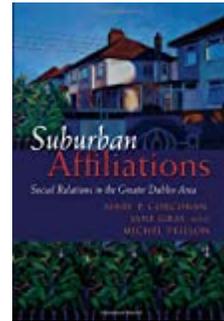




Mary P. Corcoran, Jane Gray, Michel Peillon. *Suburban Affiliations: Social Relations in the Greater Dublin Area.* Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010. 328 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8156-3214-6.



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Suburban Development and Place Affiliation

The overall goal of this book is to explore, through a comparative analysis, the ways in which suburbs develop, consolidate across time, and become the object of affection or disaffection among their inhabitants, and how people live and experience daily life in them. In other words, the book aims to identify the kinds of neighborhoods that we are creating around the city, in a time of rapid and profound social change, as well as to assess the quality of contemporary suburban living. The analysis is conducted by reference to the main argument that structures the book, according to which, for a suburb to satisfy its residents' needs, it must produce a minimum level of affiliation among residents, what the authors term sense of 'communality.' The book identifies the factors that contribute to the creation of this sense of communality, in other words, to the social embedding of suburban residents in their localities, the variations in their levels of affiliation, as well as those factors that have the potential to create the conditions for disaffiliation. The comparative nature of this research is one of the facets that distinguishes this book from other studies in this field.

To arrive to their conclusions, the authors studied four suburbs, in and around the city of Dublin, each with specific characteristics (Leixlip; Lucan-Esker; Mullingar; and Ratoath), in the context of the research project—the New Urban Living Study—which had as its aim to investigate recent suburban development in Ireland. The book revisits perspectives and assessments available in the literature on the suburban social structure, which are, to some extent, negative, providing instead a rather more positive view of suburban affiliation, highlighting the many different ways through which the inhabitants of suburbs relate to the place and to each other. As the authors show along the various chapters, suburbs are neither a desert from the point of view of the social relations nor a place of hyper social activity, as the literature on suburban development and suburban living tends to portray. The book questions whether Dublin suburbs are similar to those in other European cities, with which Ireland and Dublin have close economic and social relations, or highly influenced, due to historical and cultural reasons, by the American suburbs. The book is organized

into three parts, with ten chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion, and an appendix (twenty pages) with detailed data on each of the four suburban areas examined.

In the first part (‘‘Locating the Suburbs: The International and the Irish Context’’), the book places the case studies in context, and discusses, in three chapters, the significance of suburbs, the formation of suburbs in Dublin, and the life course in a suburb. In the first chapter (‘‘The Significance of Suburbs’’), the authors offer a comprehensive overview of the literature on suburban development and introduce the book. This is followed in the next chapter (‘‘Suburban Formation: The Case of Dublin’’) by an analysis of suburban development in Ireland, and by an outline of the methodology adopted in the research process on which this book is based. This part ends, in chapter 3 (‘‘Suburbs and the Life Course’’), with an analysis of demographic and other social aspects of the Greater Dublin Area, situating each of the four case studies within this context.

In the second part (‘‘Attachment and Belonging in Suburbia’’) the book deals, in four chapters, with the processes that generate affiliation in relation to suburbs. In the first chapter (‘‘Suburban Pastoralism and Sense of Place’’) of this part, the authors explore the sense of place that has developed in the four suburbs selected as case studies, and provide, against a widely held perspective, empirical evidence that suggests the existence, among large sections of the population living in the suburbs, of a strong sense of attachment to suburbs and affiliation. Chapter 5 (‘‘Linked Lives: Personal Communities in the Suburbs’’) shows that despite the trend for the development, in our contemporary societies, of ‘‘person-based’’ communities instead of ‘‘place-based’’ ones, due to the extensive use of information and communication technologies, in particular the Internet, and the emergence of ‘‘families-of-choice,’’ there is in these four suburbs a majority of people (respondents) that is embedded in the local community through a myriad of networks of daily interaction, which have, as the authors identified, different configurations according to the ‘‘suburb’s’’ maturity, demographic composition, the life-stage timing of respondents’ move there, and the nature of preexisting social ties’’ (p. xxii). Chapter 6 (‘‘Family-Friendly Communities?’’) explores the extent to which these new suburbs may be considered family friendly and concludes that the evidence was consistent with previous research findings on suburbs in the United States. This part ends with chapter 7 (‘‘Making Friends and Losing Spaces’’), which focuses on the role children may have in the building of

community affiliation in these suburbs and concludes, based on the evidence collected, that children (respondents) were satisfied with the quality of life they have in the suburb, preferred by comparison to life in the city.

In the third part (‘‘The Public Life of Suburbs’’), with three chapters, the book explores the different forms of public engagement and citizen activism in the suburbs. The first chapter in this section (‘‘Joining In: The Dynamics of Voluntary Associations’’) deals with the dynamics of voluntary associations, an important facet in any social structure at the local level. Based on these four suburbs, the chapter reveals different dynamics in each of them, in part the result of their social characteristics. It is followed in the second chapter (‘‘Fragments of Activism’’) by an exploration of different forms of activism, and the reasons behind them, concluding that the level of activism varies greatly among these suburbs and responds to different motives. This part ends with chapter 10 (‘‘Community and the Structure of Social Capital’’), which is focused on the analysis of social capital (i.e., attachment to place; inclusion in networks of personal support; social participation) as an indicator of the relative level of community or affiliation in these suburbs, revealing as before differences between these four suburbs.

In the conclusion (‘‘Suburban Variation and Suburban Affiliation’’), the authors bring together the main findings and insights presented in the different chapters. Among others, it is important to note the conclusion that the new suburbs of Dublin, examined in the book, are far from being homogeneous areas, both inside and by comparison to each other, and for that reason the quality of life and attachment or affiliation enjoyed by suburban inhabitants differ from place to place.

Based on sound and updated empirical evidence on suburban living experience, examined by reference to the extensive literature on suburban development on both sides of the Atlantic, and offering innovative insights on the issue of suburban living, the book is useful to students, researchers, and practitioners in the multidisciplinary field of urban studies, and represents an important new contribution to the scholarship on the development of suburbs in major urban areas in developed countries and on the quality of life and place attachment or affiliation that prevail in these areas. The authors’ findings and reflections, namely those related to issues and processes often neglected in previous scholarship on suburbs, are definitely also valuable for the interpretation of suburban development in other major cities, in Europe and North America.

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