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Picture by Rosângela Fidelis

## **SUBURBIA vs. SUPERBIA**

**Challenges of 21st century Policies, economies and developments of (sub)urban world**

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A suburb or suburbia is a residential area, existing either as part of a city or urban area or as a separate residential community within commuting distance of a city. Suburbs tend to proliferate around cities that have an abundance of adjacent flat land. Suburbs first emerged on a large scale in the 19th and 20th centuries as a result of improved rail and road transport, which led to an increase in commuting. In general, they have lower population densities than inner-city neighborhoods within a metropolitan area, and most residents commute to central cities or other business districts; however, there are many exceptions, including industrial suburbs, planned communities, and satellite cities. The low density, dispersed, sprawling nature of suburbia – far from jobs, services and amenities, is leading to a car-driving non-walking life with all the associated obesity, diabetes, heart-disease and indeed depression. And of course, the dispersed model of suburbia is not only bad for us, it also costs the earth.

On the other side, Superbia is a synonym for dense urban structures, as the "ideal" urban mixed-use community that often picture perfect life.

It is not a big surprise, that suburbia became predominant built context in the world, yet it is more of surprise, that we lack serious suburban development models and policies. Urban theory of the last century seems to recognize it, but not deal with it. It is truth, that biggest political and economic power still applies to big urban centers – *superbia*, but many professionals are already recognizing, that suburbia is the place, where new ideas and social innovations will happen in the future. Clearly, we have to enable more people to live closer to transport nodes and at the heart of our towns and cities, we also have to retro-fit and re-design existing suburbia with a more urban density, a more compact street network and more local amenities so as to, in essence, make them much more walkable, viable and indeed sustainable centers. We have to aim reinforcing both a sense of local community and the future of inclusive, sustainable design. Superbia is getting richer and on the other hand the suburbia is getting poorer. Precarization of the working class, migration, economic inequality, racial and religious segregation, gentrification, job decline, environmental pollution ... these are just some of the processes, seen in global suburbia.

It is clear, that suburbia is responsible for high level of global land and energy consumption, and it is unstoppably spreading. Mostly it is happening due to faster and faster transportation networks, easier property development process and constant need for economic growth through construction and property development. Even if there are many global, national and local sustainability strategies and treaties, none of them seems to seriously applies and challenge spread of global suburbs.

The rediscovery of our suburbs is an opportunity not to look back, but forward to a new future for an old idea whose day has come again. Suburbs of the future based on the virtues of the past and the values of the present – Superbia.