What makes ‘urban’ urban and ‘suburban’ suburban? Urbanity and patterns of consumption in everyday life

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1. INTRODUCTION
Where does the boundary between ‘urban’ and ‘suburban’ lie? How society and people distinguish between the two? The way in which people consume is closely related to the forms of the built environments (e.g. Goss, 1992; Zukin, 1998). For example, as residential developments have expanded to the outskirts of the city or town, suburban shopping centres have also grown, being located away from public transport and thus necessitating people using private transport. People go shopping to a shopping mall, where there are other facilities found on site (e.g. those for entertainment and leisure activities). So, families may spend a day there, eating and entertaining themselves, as well as shopping. While suburban consumption activities rely on private transport, urban consumption is more associated with proximity to space for consumption activities, including smaller-scale everyday consumption for essentials.

In the light of this close association between the built environment and consumption patterns, this paper explores characteristics of urban and suburban ways of life from both theoretical and empirical perspectives. This paper initially presents a history of urbanisation, or urban transformation, discussing the urban-rural linkage, suburbanisation and regeneration of inner-city areas (re-urbanisation), in order to understand the morphology and functions of urban and suburban areas. Next, the paper looks at consumption patterns and people’s ways of life in urban and suburban contexts, clarifying the characteristics of consumption activities in both environments. It then explores the ways in which (sub)urban built environments are used, perceived and evaluated by the residents, by using cases from Slovenia and the UK. In doing so, the present paper attempts to tentatively understand how ‘urban’ and ‘suburban’ ways of life can be (or cannot be) distinguished.

2. URBANISATION AND THE PROCESS OF URBAN-RURAL LINKAGE – BLURRING OF URBAN-RURAL BOUNDARY

Urbanisation can be presented as a common denominator that includes many complex phenomena and processes which happened as a consequence of changes in the organisation of the way of life and work. It is a dynamic process to which new elements and characteristics are constantly added. There are a number of explanations for why and how urbanisation has occurred; and they are mutually supporting and call attention to different important dimensions to the process. Urbanisation is often interpreted as a process of city growth and rise in the number of urban population. As
such, it is often perceived as a statistic measure to evaluate the number of inhabitants who live in cities or settlements that are defined by specific political, cultural or administrative (or official) criteria. This rather ‘reductive’ view of urbanisation, however, can be elaborated with views that seek to separate cities from other areas by looking at the way in which work and dwellings are organised. So, an increase in the number or the concentration of inhabitants in certain areas doesn’t necessary represent urbanism; rather, the “extension of the social and behavioural characteristics of urban living across the society as a whole” (Pacione, 2003: 67) needs to be considered.

Urbanisation can be understood, in a broader sense, as a particular way of life, which includes a specific quality of social relations, interpreted by classics of sociology as urbanity or “a urban way of life” (Wirth, 1938). Wirth (1938: 1) describes the city as a “relatively large, dense and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals”. Lefebvre (1974) sees urbanity or urban centrality as a vast collection of elements, which include high frequency of encounters, cultural and ethnic heterogeneity, art and artistic artefacts, unpredictability, public performance, exchange of different impulses, and perceptions of space with the use of all senses. Similarly, Bunting and Fillion (2000) characterise the city as a space of intensive social interaction and exchange between strangers. Life in the city allows planned, or unplanned and spontaneous, communication and diminishes the costs of interaction (measured by time, effort and money). Simmel (1950 [1903]) describes the city as an area of reserved and rather indifferent (blasé attitudes) individuals but simultaneously asserts that insensitivity could be the consequence of extremely rich and versatile impulses that the city offers at each corner. He explains that quick and continuous changes of internal and external impressions represent “psychological basis for the metropolitan type of individuality” (ibid.). Thus, urbanity concerns space as a social dimension and includes emotions, coincidence and possibility, complexity and difference, in other words, the coexistence of contradictions in the same space.

Lindauer (1970), and Ruppert and Schaffer (1973) interpret urbanisation as the spread of ‘progress’, i.e. the extension of urban ways of life into the hinterland. Especially in the period before the Second World War, urbanisation was used to stress the difference between urban and rural ways of life. The latter was perceived as less refined and non-progressive. According to Williams (1973), the presence of classical urban-rural dichotomy between the 16th and 19th centuries was significant. He states that the dichotomy, which represents two different socio-cultural systems, remained strong until the end of the Second World War. After the War, the process of intensive industrialisation reached its peak and affected the way people perceived the city and its hinterland. Gradually, the relation between the city and its (presupposed rural) hinterland started to change, i.e. the classical urban-rural dichotomy began to crack, with the city no longer having the exclusive power over the surroundings.¹

Industrial urbanisation

¹ The hinterland is the area, which surrounds the city and is connected to the city due to various needs (e.g. work, market, protection). The hinterland includes areas where it is still possible to ‘feel’ the influence and at least partial dependency upon the city. In the pre-industrial period, the hinterland was equal to the countryside. With industrialisation the relations between the city and its hinterland began to intermingle. The city and its influence spread far into the hinterland, which can no longer be equalled with the countryside.
In the industrialisation period before the Second World War, the city (downtown) represented the centre of the city region and had a significant influence over the hinterland. In relation to the hinterland, the city functioned as a primary highly-specialised service centre, which attracted the working force and collected resources that were needed for production and economic growth. Settlements within the city region were structured in a classical “hierarchical way” (Christaller, 1933) from the functionally most specialised city core to the hinterland, which included settlements with the lowest level of specialisation. As industrialisation continued and the concentration of population, industry, services and other activities increased, the city and its influence expanded into the hinterland. The high concentration of people and their activities in the central areas have led to the expansion of the city region, due to lack of lands and worsening living conditions. People who work, and newcomers who would like to work, in the city are forced to search for residence in big suburban areas that are being built outside the city centre. Thus, suburbanisation represents demographic and spatial growth in settlements in the outskirts as an effect of migration from the city and its hinterland (Germ, 1999). At this stage some city regions (Figure 1) develop into bigger, metropolitan regions, which include a large number of population, dependent on centralised services, working areas, and cultural and educational institutions that are located in the central areas of the metropolis.

Figure 1: Scheme of the city region

If the predominance of the city in relation to the hinterland generated deagrarisation and the formation of suburbs in the first period of industrialization (until the Second World War), the second period of industrialisation marks a gradual fusion of the city and its hinterland. In this period many ‘traditional’ city services as consumption, leisure activities and production are being moved from the central areas of the city to its edges and even further into the hinterland. In this sense, it is getting harder to draw
a clear line between the city, suburbia and rural areas. It is also hard to distinguish urban from ‘non-urban’ ways of life. Large suburban and presupposed rural areas are acquiring characteristics that were once synonymous with the city. In this regard, we cannot simply speak of the expansion of the city into the hinterland, as the city is also being transformed and is becoming more connected to, and dependent upon, its hinterland.

3. BASIS OF THE URBAN-RURAL LINKAGE – AUTOMOBILITY, SUBURBANISATION AND CONSUMPTION

Mass migrations and a shift in functions from the city centre to the outskirts, i.e. suburbanisation of consumption and other activities, started in Europe in the 1960s. Suburbanisation was fuelled by various socio-political, economical and technological transformations. These include changes in the use of building materials, the application of different planning regulations, an increase in the number of car-transport users, and also among other factors, changes in the cultural values linked to life in the city. Many authors (e.g. Duany and Plater-Zyberk, 2001; Jacobs, 1994) see suburbanisation as a component of the so-called ‘American dream’, putting emphasis on people’s living preferences. Desires to live in a comfortable house, to have a big car, to be in a pleasant working environment, and to live in a safe, quiet neighbourhood that is close to natural, recreational areas and big multifunctional service areas (e.g. shopping malls), all present elements of this dream.

One of the main elements, which supported, or rather, made this dream possible and affordable for a great number of people, was the standardisation of car transport and the construction of highways, which reduced the time needed to travel from the hinterland to the city. Car transport enabled people to live outside the central areas of the city and contributed to urban sprawl and the construction of big suburban areas, which are well connected to the central areas. In fact, extensive use of cars, to some extent, destroyed urbanism of the 19th century. Especially in European cities, the narrow streets in the central (historical) parts of the city became non-functional for car transport and too small for new ‘suburban dreamers’ who wanted more space, green, peace, comfort and shopping at a lower price. It seems that “automobility” (Urry, 1999), i.e. patterns of socio-cultural behaviour that are dependent on car transport, became one of the most common elements of social action, and contrary to all spatial plans, most profoundly influenced the development of the city.

In previous historical periods commercial activities were usually located in the central areas of the city. Today, these activities are, due to different functional conditions of the modern society, largely translocated to the outskirts or “edge cities” (Garreau, 1991). As a result, edge cities adapt to new social conditions, such as changes in everyday practices of consumers. Multifunctional shopping malls lie close to important infrastructural networks – highways that guarantee easy car access – and have many free parking space and possibilities to extend consumer activities. Central areas of the city are, unlike shopping malls in the outskirts, not so flexible. With their compact urban structure and being usually protected as parts of historical and cultural

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2 Compared to North America cities, mass suburbanisation started with a twenty-year delay in European cities.
heritage, these areas do not have so much free space for the extension of activities. Under these new circumstances, city centres differentiate their offers from those of shopping malls and do not compete with edge cities, which try to attract consumers with car accessibility and low prices.

Central areas have other qualities. They can be found in enriched (aesthetic) ambience and historic architectural contexts, which are connected with identity and cultural representations of the city. The city centre works as a unique ambience, “scenery” (Hočevar, 2000), which is set up from different elements that have been accumulated over time. Despite the fact that the central part of the city represent some kind of a ‘trademark’ or ‘status symbol’ of the city, it appears that these features in some cities are not interesting enough to attract a larger number of people. City centres thus cannot survive without big economic investments in the city’s infrastructure (e.g. public transport, roads, housing, etc.) and other services (e.g. museums, theatres, other social events, attractive architecture, etc.). This vulnerability of city centres, which tend to deteriorate if left to spontaneous market conditions that favour mass consumption in the outskirts, was not left unnoticed. Various authors like Jacobs (1961), Garreau (1991), Ascher (1995) and others have described harmful effects of automobility and urban sprawl.

In a similar, but little more dramatic, context, French poststructuralist, Debord (1999) most critically wrote about urban sprawl, automobility and the formation of new multifunctional spaces, which are located in the ‘intermediary zone’, between the city and the countryside. He presupposes that in the process, where elements of the city (and remains of its urbanity) mix with elements of the countryside, some completely new “spatio-organisational forms” (Debord, 1999: 117) are taking shape. Debord dramatically described this new phase in the evolution of cities as: “the reconstruction of semi-countryside, where natural relationships of old countryside and social relationships of historical city are lost” (ibid.). Semi-countryside is neither a city or a village, but is an eclectic mix of both living systems and represents one of the most common spatio-organisational structures in the “disappearing city”. If the history of urban economy was, up to the last decade, based on the contradiction and confrontation between the city and the countryside, we are now witnessing a turnabout, which points at a new spatio-organisational form in which the city is in the same melting pot as the countryside.

In spite of criticism that radiates from Debord’s description of urban sprawl, one can still grasp the magnitude of the effect that automobility had on the transformation in the relation between the city, suburbs and countryside. Industrialisation, the introduction of automobiles and suburbanisation as a consequence of these processes had significant effects on urbanity.

4. REGENERATION OF THE CITY

With the suburbanisation of mass consumption (e.g. shopping) and other ‘city’ activities (e.g. cinema, recreation and other leisure activities) classical urbanity is losing its impetus and therefore should be replaced by new ‘(post)modern urbanity’ if we want the city centre to attract people and be more vibrant. One of the main
elements of post-modern urbanity is the reinstallation of consumption activities back into the city as an important element of its urbanity.

The role that consumption, especially cultural consumption (e.g. going to the theatre, the cinema, and art exhibitions, eating out and having a drink in a bar) play in the process of urban regeneration, together with historic ambience, has been noted by a number of researchers. Jackson (1995), for example, states that the economic reason of reinvestment was ‘culturally encoded’. That is to say, reinvestment was linked to artistic production, the aura of historic architecture and industrial heritage of the area: old factories and warehouses were converted into art galleries and artists’ workshops. A precedent of this type of regeneration is well-depicted in Zukin’s (1989) study of loft living in New York City and in Cole’s (1987) work on artists and urban redevelopment in New Jersey. While a coalition of forces, such as planners, politicians and developers, made the regeneration process successful, an artistic and historic ambience and authenticity attracted middle-class people to the inner-city areas (Zukin, 1989). Zukin (1989) denies the assumptions that loft living is seen as unconventional housing which attracts unconventional people and that it succeeded in the area where regular housing failed, bringing suburban residents who otherwise would not move in to the inner city. Indeed, Ley (2003) argues that the aesthetic appropriation of place appeals particularly to those who are higher in cultural capital than economic capital (e.g. professionals in the media and design, higher education and other non-commercial sectors). They are, like artists, indifferent to the charms of suburban life and had entered the metropolitan space.

In the 1970s, this regeneration model was adopted in a number of large cities in North America and many historical and waterfront areas were transformed into residential and retail/leisure developments, basically based around ‘up-market’ consumption. Local authorities encouraged a high cultural input, including artists’ residences, subsidised workshops and public arts that fitted well with a new ‘postmodern’ aesthetic (O’Connor and Wynne, 1996). Cultural consumption increasingly plays an important part in the transformation of urban landscapes. As O’Connor and Wynne (1996, p.52) put it, it has brought vibrancy back to the inner city, making ‘the fragmented vernacular of the old productive communities into an aesthetic landscape’. Such vibrancy is based on a lifestyle that can be consumed, whether in the form of the fashionable lofts or the bohemian ambiance of the restaurants, bars, galleries and shops, rather than linked to a traditional productive community (ibid.). So, for some, the meaning of urban living has become a pursuit of cultural capital (Zukin, 1998). With the image of the artist-bohemian in the guise of flaneur in the aestheticised 19th century, the regenerated areas became space for the middle-class stroller who had the time and cultural knowledge (O’Connor and Wynne, 1996). The idea of “flaneur (flâneur)” was originally put forward by Baudelaire (1960, 1969). Classical Baudelaire’s flaneur is a voyeur or spectator who enjoys observing street life. He is a part of street scenography and a chronicler of the street, which makes an inventory of events in the city with his gaze, written text or canvas. However, today’s flaneur has a different ‘function’ in the city and can be described as “hibridisation of flaneur/flaneuse and modern consumer” (Falk and Campbell, 1997: 3). (Post)modern

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3 Some authors emphasise the role that the production of arts and culture played in regeneration and gentrification, stating that artists and those working in cultural industries, and their creative activities, contribute to urban and regional redevelopment, both culturally and economically (e.g. Cole, 1987; Lloyd, 2002; 2004).
flaneur who takes part in everyday city life is mostly a consumer, while shopping is represented as a “dominant characteristic of today’s public life” (ibid.: 3).

This model of urban regeneration was adopted in Europe, too. For example, in the UK, after massive de-industrialisation in the early 1980s, inner cities became symbols of the ‘British disease’ (O’Connor and Wynne, 1996). In this context, the public consumption of arts through public arts and artistic events (e.g. the creation of landmark buildings such as galleries and concert halls) became public policies of local authorities of ‘post-recession’ provincial towns in the 1990s. Those local authorities began to appreciate the potential value of arts and culture for social and economic regeneration and encouraged the public consumption of arts in order to regenerate disadvantaged areas. The local areas that used to be run down have now been renewed, accommodating cultural facilities; and this brings private developments, such as hotels, restaurants, bars and new residential blocks; and this attracts many people, especially affluent, young professionals, back to the city centre (Cameron and Coaffee, 2004); and this approach has widely and successfully been adopted in Europe (e.g. the Cable Factory project in Helsinki).4 Thus, regeneration is linked to a re-imaging of the place (Wynne and O’Connor, 1998). In this process, both culture that is consumed and the built environment become commodified (Ley, 2003; Zukin, 1989). As some researchers claim, such commodification is central to understanding of the post-modern urban transformation (e.g. Gotham, 2002; Wynne and O’Connor, 1998).

It is clear that consumption activities have an important role in the transformation of urban landscapes and in the creation of post-modern urbanity. The introduction of (cultural) consumption into an area, despite its negative consequences, contributes to the upgrading of the area, attracting people with the new image and facilities. So, these conditions now raise our awareness of the residents’ consumption patterns and ways of life in the both suburban and city contexts. The following section examines the way in which urban and suburban residents consume.

5. CONSUMPTION PATTERNS AND WAYS OF LIFE IN THE CITY AND SUBURBS

As mentioned in the introduction, there is a close relationship between the form of built environments, and patterns of consumption and ways of life. To what extent, then, do urban and suburban consumption patterns differ from each other?

A general picture of suburban lifestyles is urban employment, reliance on private transport, family-orientation and mass consumption (Burnett, 1986; Thorns, 1972; Williams, 1987; Zukin, 1998). With rail extension, the construction of new arterial roads and by-passes and car-ownership, the suburbs have acted as dormitories for

4 However, there is complexity and contradiction in historic preservation. It is a selective process, reflecting respectable middle-class tastes, in terms of what is worth saving and how it is preserved. As a result, preservation becomes a sanitised version of the urban past, suppressing unacceptable working-class connotations (Jackson, 1995; Jacobs, 1992). There are further downsides to these upmarket transformation processes. They inevitably involve social-spatial change (Ley, 2003)4 and can result in population change, the loss of stable communities and residential displacement or segregation (Cameron, 2003; Cole, 1987; Savage et al., 2003; Zukin, 1998). Re-imaging of a place can bring the political nature of neighbourhood change in the sense that it benefits some groups more than others while involving a variety conflicting ideologies (Jackson, 1995).
those who work in the town (Burnett, 1986; Williams, 1987): many people commute to the city and live in the suburbs. One of the main features in suburban consumption is people’s reliance on automobiles, rather than on collective modes of transport, such as buses and trains, as seen above.

In this light, suburban shopping centres that are hard to reach without private transport can obtain a high social status. This, then, leads to exclusivity of such spaces of consumption (Zukin, 1998). The shopping centre is a focal spot in suburban consumption activities. It is not only a place where retailers sell and consumers purchase, but also provides entertainment and education, offering food and drinks, funfairs, concerts, fitness classes, adult education and so on. It is a safe and sanitised alternative to the old city street, with street furniture like benches and landscapes with trees and fountains, and this is where families go on outings, elderly people meet and teenagers hang about (Goss, 1992). In this sense, a shopping centre is a public space that depends on group of people, rather than individuals; and this clean, sprawling homogeneous public space has replaced old consumption spaces of cities (Zukin, 1998). Such shopping centres are an ultimate, heterogeneous ‘cathedral of consumption’ (Ritzer, 1999), which encourage, and is encouraged by, people’s mass consumption activities.

One of the consequences of suburbanisation is the separation of work and home and also separate conjugal roles (i.e. women typically remain at home and look after the family and home). That is to say, many women living in the suburbs are, or have become, housewives, and non-working mothers, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries (Savage et al., 2003; Williams, 1987). The image of a family with a commuting father, a non-working mother and children living in a single-family home with a car(s) has been commonly presented in media (Savage et al., 2003).

Unlike suburban lifestyles, urban lifestyles are less centred around reliance on private transport or family life. The main feature of urban lifestyles is proximity to urban amenities and the vitality of urban life (Zukin, 1998). For example, some middle-class people have preoccupation with consuming arts, culture and the built environment (Lloyd and Clark, 2001). People take pleasure from the transformed urban landscape with the sense of vibrancy and artistic ambiance. They enjoy going to the theatre or concerts, and eating out in a restaurant which is within a walking distance and or is convenient with public transport. This extensive use of urban spaces and amenities tends to involve sociability (Butler, 1997). The idea of being in urban centres with easy access to facilities, which is opposite to the idea of suburban living, represents a space of socialisation and cultural consumption on a non-exclusionary basis. It offers an image of galleries, cafés and restaurants, and provides spaces for strolling, sitting and diverse social interaction (O’Connor and Wynne, 1996).

Allen and Blady (2004) distinguish two types of inner-city dwellers: ‘city-centre tourists’ and ‘city-centre dwellers’. The former seek to experience living within the city before fulfilling their preference to live in the suburbs. Urban lifestyles are, for them, a temporary thing. The latter group include ‘successful agers’ who have done the ‘family thing’ and ‘counter-culturalists’ such as gay people. They seek lifestyle changes and are therefore attracted to inner-city ways of life because it enables them to accommodate their new, non-traditional lifestyles. Furthermore, Butler and Robson (2003) suggest that current gentrification processes can be seen as an attempt by
contemporary middle-class people who live, or want to live, in the inner-city area to gain a nostalgic view of their own past. This is shown by their “desire to build a local community within a global city that maps onto their particular set of values, backgrounds, aspirations and resources” (ibid., p.1795). The existence of shops and cafes in the street or around the corner where people know each other may make people feel as if they were living in a small community in which they may have spent their childhood. People long for community as a consequence of living in an increasingly uncertain globalised world (Bauman, 2000).

Gans (1968) claimed that sociologist could not speak of a suburban or urban way of life, as he believed that what characterises neighbourhoods was not cities and suburbs themselves, but characteristics of residents, such as life-cycles stages, household composition, income, educational levels and classes. Still, the existing literature indicates some characteristic differences in consumption patterns in urban and suburban contexts. So, this may mean that urban and suburban environments attract people with different characteristics, and therefore with different values, because the form of the built environment in respective areas facilitate different ways of life and consumption activities.

5. CASES FROM SLOVENIA AND THE UK

Connotations of a suburban way of life differ from one country to another. In Anglo-Saxon countries, for example, the suburbs have negative connotations, such as boring and monotonous, whereas it is merely a geographical term in continental Europe. This section presents people’s perceptions of urban and suburban living in Slovenia and the UK in order to illustrate how people perceive urban and suburban living.

Slovenia

Suburbanisation in Slovenia followed a less ‘systematic’ path. Dwellings in the suburban areas were mainly built by individuals, and to a lesser degree, by state-owned construction companies. Individuals perceived house building as an improvement of their social standard. As such, suburban housing was characterised by low density (the smaller number of housing units per area), use of large plots of land for housing and the construction of large (multi-storey) houses.

Although dispersed suburbanisation has some unfavourable effects (e.g. negative impacts on environment, high costs of communal infrastructure, etc.), it seems that the Slovenian population still favours suburban living over urban living. Table 1 shows residential preferences of Slovenian people.


6 An average plot of land for housing in Slovenia measures around 800 m² (in cities) and 1000 m² (in suburban areas), whilst in other European states these figures range from 500-600 m² in cities and up to 700 m² in the outskirts (Drozg, 1999: 16).
Table 1: Where would you like to live if you had a chance to?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residential preferences</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 In the Country side, (rural area)</td>
<td>31,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 In a small settlement (non-rural area)</td>
<td>27,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 In a larger settlement or small town (up to 20,000 inhabitants)</td>
<td>10,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 In the suburbs of larger city</td>
<td>13,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 In the center of a larger city (with over 50,000 inhabitants)</td>
<td>3,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 It doesn’t matter where, as long as there are good transport connections</td>
<td>10,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Don’t know</td>
<td>3,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100,0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Centre for Spatial Sociology (2002) Slovene Public Opinion about Highways, 2002, Ljubljana, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences Centre for Spatial Sociology

The table shows that the largest number of people would prefer to live outside of the big cities: in the countryside (predominantly rural areas) (31,3 %), in a small settlement (22,2 %), in a larger settlement or small town with up to 20,000 inhabitants (10,9 %) and suburbs of a larger city (13,9 %). Furthermore, 10 per cent of the survey respondents are not bothered with the location as long as there is good transport access to places that are important for their everyday life (e.g. work, leisure etc.).

It appears that the Slovenian population perceives suburban areas as a good balance between natural and urban amenities. This ‘semi-urban’ way of life is possible because of relatively good road infrastructure, which enables quick short-distance migration to the city centre or to other parts of the city region. This finding can also be supported by the data presented in Tables 2 and 3, which show the way in which residents of the Ljubljana region see the advantages of shopping facilities both in the city centre and in the outskirts.

Advantages of city-centre shopping that residents of Ljubljana perceive are to be a nice shopping area. Here, the stress should be put not on the large number of shopping facilities, but on its ambience and aesthetic functions of urban centre as a trade-off. Respondents in this study rank typical ambient functions that cannot be found in the shopping centres in the outskirts of the city, as second (21,4% - vicinity of the city centre) and as third (13,8% - aesthetic appearance, attractiveness of the city centre). Suburban shopping centres, on the other hand, have different qualities, which can be best described by better and easier car access\(^7\), which enables people to have more comfort in shopping such as easy transport of purchases. Easier access to shopping facilities seems to be one of the most important characteristic for the residents of the Ljubljana region: 58 per cent of the respondents consider this characteristic to be the most important when describing the advantages of shopping centres in the outskirts. This suggests that easy access to shops is a single important element that keeps the high level of attraction for suburban living among the Slovenian population.

\(^7\) Transport in Slovenia mainly depends on car transport. Research shows that only around 15-20% of people use public transport in cities regularly (Ninamedia Research, 2000).
Tables 2 and 3: Perceived advantages of shopping facilities in the city centre and the outskirts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages of shopping in the city centre</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Advantages of shopping in the outskirts</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Big choice, larger offer and many shops</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>Easier access to the shops, possibility of parking</td>
<td>57.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicinity of the city centre</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>Big shopping facilities</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic appearance, attractiveness of the city centre</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>Lower prices</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faster shopping</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>Vicinity of the shops</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better quality of the products, nicer shops</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>No crowd, relaxed shopping</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower prices</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Kindness of staff</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicinity of public transport</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Faster shopping, lower consumption of time</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling comfortable, the power of habit</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Protection from the weather</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindness of staff</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Suitability for big purchases</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shops that are not in shopping centres</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less crowd</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The UK
This Anglo-Saxon negativity towards suburbs partly originates from systematised suburban development: housing developments are the monotony of mass, with regularity in elevation and similarity in design, despite some effort to put individuality to each house like gables, door furniture and house name. Criticism on monotonous repetition goes not only for houses, but also for street layouts (Oliver et al. 1981).

According to a community poll (RICS, 2002) conducted with 1,001 adults in the UK, only 26 per cent of them want to live in the suburbs, whereas 36 per cent would like to live in a village or a rural location and 35 per cent in the city or town. People participate in the life of their neighbourhood by using local shops and services (93%). This shows that local amenities such as shopping facilities are important to their everyday life no matter where people live.

Table 4. Where would like ideally like to live?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideal living location</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A village</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An isolated rural location</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A market town</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A seaside town</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A city centre</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A new town</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An inner suburbs close to the city centre</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An inter-war suburb on the outskirts of a city</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to further explore how urban residents perceive their living environments, 32 in-depth interviews were conducted with those living in ‘gentrified’ neighbourhoods of inner London, UK in 2003-4. The outcomes show that the boundary between urban and suburban is perceptual and subjective. Typically used words to describe the suburbs are: boring and homogeneous; and these comments go not only for the physical design, but also for suburban living itself:

‘I'm not particularly interested in living in kind of a leafy street with a whole lot of people exactly like me. Living in the city is a mixture of different people, ways of living. The thing to me about the suburbs, they seem so homogenous.’

‘I don’t want to be somewhere that’s very leafy. Not really interested in suburban living at all. I’m very urban, really love cities. I just think there’s much more of a buzz about them. I like convenience. I like the idea of a bit more vibrancy. So for me, the idea of living somewhere where you are walking into a park and there’s lots of kids in pushchairs is not really interesting. Even with kids, no. I mean, Islington is about as suburban as I want to get.’

The closeness to both the city and the country is an appeal of the suburbs. The suburbs are the best of both worlds, as the English rural culture is still sentimentally admired (see Williams, 1990) while good access to the city is favoured. However, participants in this study appear to want either the city or the country, not something in-between.

‘I’m not quite sure what it is really, what is a suburb? It’s kind of not a town not a village, a bit half and half, I think you have to be brought up in a suburb to enjoy a suburb. I don’t think you can move into a suburb because I think it’s a different way of thinking, I think.’

Urban residents appear to value the central location and easy access to urban amenities due to their high participation in consumption activities in the city, while they also drive to a suburban shopping centre for ‘bulk shopping’.

‘We probably go out perhaps twice during the week … we do take advantage of the restaurants. We live close to Tate Modern, so we joined the Tate, we are members of the Tate. We go and see Shakespeare at the Globe. So, we like this area because there’s a lot going on.’

‘I just relish the easy access to everything. I like the fact I can either walk to the Barbican cinema. Or, I can go to the Warner Village, and I can bike to Tate Modern or to Tate Britain, you can walk or bus or cycle everywhere. I really like that, so why would I live in the suburbs?’

‘We shop locally most of the time… But we go to supermarkets for toilet rolls and soap powder, you know, stuff that you buy in bulk but other than those we would shop locally.’

8 For detailed descriptions of methodology, please see Ozaki (2005).
9 Research conducted in Scotland shows that the location is the dominant factor to people’s housing choice. Some prefer the suburbs because of the low density and house types (Aspinall et al. 2004).
It appears that people’s perceptions are generally formed based on the types of the built environment (or landscapes) and available amenities that are central to their everyday life. Although a further investigation is necessary to explore suburban residents’ perceptions of ‘urban’ and ‘suburban’, these interview results indicate the way a particular group of residents perceive urban and suburban living in the UK.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

One of the main features that distinguish urban and suburban consumption patterns is the way people reach the space for consumption, whether it is a shop, a shopping centre or other facilities. People, whether in the city or in the suburbs, favour easy access to amenities, but in the suburbs use of automobiles is dominant and in the central areas of cities, access without using private transport is more favoured. Another characteristic that make urban and suburban ways of life different is their mentality, or rather, ‘perceived’ mentality. Being urban may be represented by such terms as heterogeneity and individuality, whereas being suburban may be expressed by homogeneity and more collectiveness.

However, as mentioned above, many suburban areas are acquiring characteristics of city centres. For example, larger suburbs have their own urban amenities, such as a high street where many shops are found, a theatre, a multi-complex cinema as well as many restaurants and bars, and they are not totally dependent on their neighbouring cities. Similarly, given the fact that city centre and suburban amenities has different morphologies and offer different functions, it is likely that people use both amenities according to the purpose of their consumption activities.

Seen this way, it seems important to stress that it is difficult to draw a clear line between urban and suburban ways of life and consumption patterns. On the one hand, with the extension of city services deep into the surrounding city region, distant parts of the region are now acquiring not only more inhabitants of all origins, but also their ‘cargo’ (e.g. cultural, economic, working habits) which influence the traditional structure of everyday life in the suburbs. On the other hand, the extensive gentrification and commodification process in central urban areas, which tend to attract many residents and also exclude various groups of inhabitants, leave us with questions regarding what urbanity, or urban ways of life, in the city centre is in reality. We can, therefore, no longer easily employ the traditional stereotypes about urban or suburban ways of life and are now obliged to pay greater attention to the process of urban-suburban linkage in the discussion of urban and suburban consumption and lifestyles. As Gans (1968) put it, out residential environments may be characterised by characteristics of residents and their values, rather than by cities and suburbs themselves.
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