Kyiv, Ukraine - Revised Edition

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Published by Amsterdam University Press

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Amsterdam University Press, 2016.

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9 “Suburbia”

9.1 The Residential Ring

I am not the first urbanist to write a book about a city and focus disproportionately on a small area in the historic center at the expense of a vast outer ring of urban development. The center always draws those who love cities, has more history, more variety, and more action per unit area, and disproportionately distinguishes the city from other cities. But the zones beyond the center are important, too, and we now turn to a profile of Kyiv’s “residential ring” and its changes in post-Soviet time (Kravets and Sovsun, 2012; Skubytska, 2012; Tyshchenko, 2012b). I write “suburbia” in quotations because not all of the places that we will discuss here are actually beyond Kyiv’s municipal limits. A great many of Kyiv’s bedroom zones (spalni raiony) are well within the city.

We can think of Kyiv as essentially two residential zones: (1) a central core in which the majority of dwellings are older apartment structures such as those from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but within which many new tall, modern residential structures are being built; and (2) an expansive outer zone of newer apartment buildings, most generally taller than the older ones in the core, that is the ring of “bedroom suburbs” around the city. Another fair generalization is to say that much of the development of the outer zone began after World War II as a response to the housing shortages that were caused by wartime damage in the city and postwar rural-to-urban migration. Construction was stepped up in the 1970s and 1980s in connection with the Soviet government’s efforts to ease the housing crisis that was exacerbated with extra-rapid population growth and industrialization, and to improve the quality of urban housing. The majority of these buildings are in planned mikroraion developments that characterize Soviet city planning. These neighborhood units were all pretty much the same, not just across Kyiv but also within Soviet urban space more generally, as were the individual apartment structures and the individual apartments.

The most fundamental change in the housing landscape is the shift from state ownership of most housing to the private sector, and the concomitant emergence of a society that is increasingly one of home and apartment owners as opposed to tenants. Most Soviet-built apartment complexes still remain, but the vast majority of units is now in private hands, although they might be rented to tenants. Indeed, it became common for Kyivans to have acquired an apartment from the state when that was first being
done at extremely favorable terms, but then to rent it and live elsewhere. Many landlords reside abroad. A great number of the older structures are in poor condition, particularly common areas such as mail rooms, elevators, and lower stairways in buildings, with many renters living in crowded, old-fashioned, and poorly equipped apartments (Ryabchuk, 2010). Some buildings are actually unsafe. There have been substantial renovations within many buildings by apartment owners who have transformed small, drab Soviet apartments into sprawling and luxurious spaces by purchasing neighboring units. In addition, there has been a boom of construction of new market-based housing since the Soviet period, most often in buildings that are taller than the Soviet six-story structures nearby, a little sleeker looking, and better equipped with respect to amenities, both common and those within individual apartments. Central air-conditioning, however, is a rarity in even top-end buildings, and their exteriors are marked with a patchwork of cooling units protruding from windows and through openings that have been cut through masonry. Many of the newer buildings fill vacant spaces between previous residential structures, while others are in new clusters of residential towers at the edges of existing urbanization. Although they might offer better housing than older structures, there are often complaints that the new structures have intruded without compensation or plan onto existing neighborhood facilities, and add unfairly to demands on everything from spaces for children in schools and playgrounds to flows of traffic and places to park, as well as infrastructure for water provision and sewerage. Such “socially irresponsible development,” as it has been called, has also infringed on people’s views from windows and balconies and access to direct sunlight without consultation or compensation.

It is mostly the newly built places that Kyivans are told to buy now and pay for later, and see advertised most often as hallmarks of a better life. Often the residential lifestyle that is packaged in the ads is represented as the “European Dream” or a “new standard in European living.” Such terminology helps potential buyers to distance themselves in their self-conceptions from the poor housing standards of the wrong side of the Iron Curtain from which they hail. Everything “European” is good: European kitchen cabinets, European toilets and faucets, European hot water heaters, and the amazing furniture and goods that are sold in that amazing blue-and-yellow logo “European” (Swedish) store, IKEA. Although the example is not about housing, I was recently amused to see a small kiosk in a working-class housing district that offered “European fashions from Poland and Turkey,” while the women’s wear shop in the kiosk next door blared on its sign that it offered Ukrainian prices. In keeping with the observations above about
advertising for new automobiles among pedestrians and bus passengers, there is also a push to advertise new housing specifically to commuters to and from work. I saw this in Japan, too, where commuters were fed a steady diet at train and subway stations for cars and better housing to be bought on credit. In Kyiv, as I have observed in Tokyo, once cold-looking pedestrian walkways in the underground system have been transformed into virtual walks through bright landscapes of new housing developments and park-like greenery, with exhortations for trudging commuters to contact the development companies or real estate agencies in charge. Another favorite example is the many marshrutkas that have been transformed into roving billboards on all sides for new lifestyles in new housing. A specific example is seen in Figure 9.1: An attractive and positively beaming family of four points happily at a rendition of a new high-rise housing complex beneath the printed exclamation Rozpochny evropeyske zhyttya! (Start Living like a European!).

In addition to planned clusters of apartment buildings, the residential ring around Kyiv also includes a second type of housing landscape, one of

Figure 9.1 A minibus (marshrutka) decorated with an advertisement for “Comfort Town,” a new housing development in Kyiv’s residential ring. The text reads “Start Living like a European!”
sizable clusters of small single homes (*osobnyaky*). Many of these areas are vestiges of old pre-urban villages on the outskirts of Kyiv that have since been swallowed up by municipal limits and have become incorporated within the city. They are not all the same, and within any one village area, houses differ one from the other in design, size, and aspect. In general, however, during Soviet times the houses were small, mostly single-story, and on generally equal-sized plots of ground that were big enough for some outbuildings, a small vegetable plot, some fruit trees, and room for a cow, pigs, goats, or some chickens, in addition to the main house. Individual allotments were fenced, with the front fence and gate along the narrow dirt road often being sturdier and somewhat decorative. Quite a few such villages were swallowed up by the expanding city and no longer exist except in the names of the housing massifs that replaced them. Some of these places were previously important as a source of fresh farm products for the urban market.

Another landscape of single homes in Kyiv is that of the dachas (small country homes). While these getaway places for city residents are usually located some distance from the urban area, such districts also exist within Kyiv’s limits, even within sight of the main landmarks of the city center. Their land plots are generally smaller, typically 6/100 of a hectare (approximately 0.15 acres), and were arranged in many cases in straight lines along dirt roads that were laid out in a planned grid. With time, quite a few dachas have been transformed by owners into year-round housing, so dacha territories are to be counted now as part of wider residential landscape. The biggest such area is the Nyzhni Sovky dacha allotments in Left Bank Kyiv along the Dnipro just downstream from the center of the city. It contains several thousand individual houses, and has a geographical area that is larger than some of Kyiv’s ten administrative districts (*raiony*). Also on the same side of the river but in the upstream part of the city is Rusnivski Sady. This zone also has more than 1,000 houses. The Berkovets dacha area in the far northwest is the largest dacha zone in Kyiv on the Right Bank. In all three of these cases, the dachas were once outside the city but then became part of Kyiv when city limits were redrawn.

Both the old villages and the zones of intra-urban dachas also have changed greatly since the Soviet period and are also part of a new, emerging postsocialist residential landscape. What stands out the most here is the replacement of small, simple homes with residential structures that are much larger. Often the construction follows original property lines, in which case the new building fills the yard except perhaps for space to park a car or cars, while in other instances the construction spans adjacent properties as in the case of apartment renovation after owners acquired the
apartments of neighbors. What also stands out is the ostentatious nature of many of these new homes. These are McMansions Ukrainian-style, or perhaps Moscow-style, as such architecture is quite common among the nouveaux riches in the Russian capital, and are adorned with the same kinds of turrets and towers and castellated crenellations that we saw in that “strange new neighborhood of Vozdvyzhenka.” As opposed to more neighborly design of the houses and gardens that they replace, these new suburban single mansions hide behind high walls and solid gates, and are secured as well by CCTV cameras and signs that warn of large, angry dogs. One sign says “Angry Dog, Call in Advance,” while another reads “My dog can get to the gate in 2 seconds. How fast can you run?” Clearly, there is no neighborliness here. All of the dacha areas within Kyiv are undergoing at least some transition to more showy housing, but the most dramatic changes of this type seem to be taking place in Nyzhni Sovky among properties nearest the river. The presence of a subway station nearby adds to the desirability of the real estate (Figure 9.2).

As apartments and single homes are remade by owners, a sizable business sector has emerged to provide materials and services. The strip shopping areas that stretch along thoroughfares in the residential ring have many

Figure 9.2 A large new private home close to Dnipro River beaches in an area that was reserved for modest dachas during Soviet times
“home center” stores that sell everything from lumber and roofing materials, to toilets, floor tiles, kitchen cabinets, lighting fixtures, paint, and tools. One chain in particular has stores that are positively huge. There is a variety of furniture stores, too. Also common are small enterprises that offer the services of handymen. Often, they are just one-man operations. Do you need new windows? A European-style kitchen or bath? Your rooms painted? A shipment of sand or cement? Topsoil? A ditch to be dug or a tree to be cut down? Old housing materials or construction waste to be hauled away? Such businesses commonly offer phone numbers on tear-away slips that flutter from the main message above. Some walls have literally hundreds of such advertisements, and reflect both the large scale of change in the surroundings and the large number of people who anxiously look for a niche in the new economy. Such ads also hang on tree trunks and light poles along roads where new construction of private homes is taking place, and within the landscape of high-rises. Companion ads are for loan agencies that offer short- and long-term credit. Some entrepreneurs paint their ads as stenciled graffiti onto sidewalks so that prospective clients can read them as they walk or see them from the windows of their upper-floor apartments. A corollary to the landscape of active home remodeling is one of trash from the past. In various spaces that fall outside of the geographical boundaries of social control and responsibility, one encounters the piles left behind by owners and contractors: old doors and windows, bags of broken tiles or masonry, old toilets, kitchen sinks, and cabinets – all blights on neighborhoods that say, ironically, that inside individual apartments or homes, there are lots of new fixtures.

9.2 Commerce, Cars, and Billboards

In addition to changing housing landscapes, there has also been a proliferation of private-sector commerce since the demise of the Soviet/socialist economy. A considerable number of stores of all sizes and descriptions have arisen along main streets and near Metro stations, including those in fancy enclosed shopping malls, along strip malls, and in hundreds upon hundreds of small scattered kiosks that bureaucrats call MAFs (*mali arkhytekturni formy* [small architectural forms]). There are huge supermarkets, furniture stores, and bright new emporia with electronics goods like wide-screen televisions or the newest models of personal computer, digital camera, or mobile telephone, as well as new and used car showrooms and inventory lots, and a range of businesses that service automobiles from garages for
repairs, to automated car washes, dealers of new tires, and multipump gasoline-filling stations. There are multiplex movie theaters, and a mix of restaurants, cafés, and bars, large and small. Among all of these businesses, many are locally owned and unique, existing as just that one outlet, but increasingly the landscape is one of commercial chains, including those from abroad that are known globally.

Supporting all this is a landscape of commercial advertising. Not only are there often big and bold signs on the businesses themselves and golden arches that reach on poles to the sky, there are enormous billboards everywhere. They stand on poles along busy streets as far as the eye can see, stretch as banners across roads from one utility pole to another, are perched atop shops and other buildings, and surround Metro stations and highway cloverleaf interchanges. Other advertising hangs as banners on unfinished buildings that occasionally reach 15 or so stories in height. There are also bright neon signs along roads and atop the tallest buildings that are kept illuminated well into the night. In contrast to the past, when signage was sparse and focused almost exclusively on public service information or political messages from the Communist Party, the landscape now reads that we should buy, buy, and buy more. It is a text of consumer society rather than the values of socialism. Increasingly, that society lives on credit. “Buy now, pay later” is an exceedingly common kind of advertising, not just in the signage of the residential ring, but also in the center of the city, on posters in buses and subway cars, in print media ads, and in commercials on television. If you do this, you can have the beautiful new apartment that your family deserves, a world of stylish furniture, a nice automobile, a vacation trip to a Red Sea beach in Egypt, as well as surgery to correct that awful nose of yours. Thus, both the advertising landscape and the landscape of businesses along the streets and in shopping centers is also one of banks, more banks, loan agencies, and pawn shops.

Another striking change is the prevalence of the automobile and the enormous changes to landscape that automobiles have brought on. While private ownership of cars was already on the rise in the last decades of socialism, there has been a spectacular jump since, and cars have come to clog Kyiv (and other cities) both in the center and the outer rings. In Kyiv, the number of privately owned automobiles is reported to have increased from 200,000 in 1990 to some 700,000 in 2006, and is expected to grow to 827,000 by 2020. It is estimated that now (2012), there are 1 million cars in the city each day when one includes those that have arrived from elsewhere. There are chronic traffic jams, and because there far too few spaces to park, there are massive invasions by automobiles of sidewalks, crosswalks, and grassy
areas. Residential complexes are ringed with cars parked outside the buildings where owners live, and are plagued at night by faulty alarm systems that keep going off. Most alarms sound alike and every sleepy owner seems to assume that it is someone else's and not his own car that has disturbed the neighborhood. Air quality has declined as well, and there is more urban sprawl. I once heard a Kyiv city officer explain that he and his colleagues in City Planning had recently been to Moscow to study how that city addresses the growing problem of traffic congestion and parking. He outlined a list of new roads, wider roads, new bridges, overpasses, underpasses, etc., that Kyiv would need as a fix. He did not seem to understand when someone from the audience pointed out that in the long run it makes more sense to plan for a city without cars than for planning for more cars, because that comment was probably too “green” for him.

As corollary to the growth in automobiles, there is heightened bifurcation of society into those with cars and those without. To my mind, among the most striking and most symbolic scenes in the residential ring are the contrasts between the many Kyivans who still trudge long distances from home to Metro station or bus stop, and who wait in long lines at bus stops for their particular marshrutka to pull up on the one hand, and the many others who zip by encased in fast-moving steel, glass, and plastic. Even more, there is a striking contrast in scale between the human forms that stand at curbside waiting for buses and the enormously high steel poles with huge and brightly lit billboards that rise above them that promise all the happiness in the world to those who buy a beefy Toyota Highlander SUV or a Czech-made Škoda Octavia A5, to cite two specific examples from different prices ranges. It seems that it is a business strategy of automobile dealers and manufacturers to promise car purchasers relief from the twinned hells of mass transit and the vast, impersonal character of the preautomobile apartment block residential landscape. Furthermore, as in other societies, having a classy car has emerged as a status symbol. In response to the advertising, many Kyivans go deep into hock to purchase an automobile, and often buy one whose cost is far disproportionate to their income level.

9.3 The Middle Class and the Malls

Just as it is common for writers about a city to focus disproportionately on the urban center at the expense of a much larger residential ring, it is common to focus on issues of rich versus poor when writing about urban society and to express solidarity with the poor, but to not write enough about the
population in the middle. Ukraine is, indeed, developing a middle class, even as we correctly despair growing inequality and income gaps between the extremes. Kyiv is the one Ukrainian city where this development is most visible. Detailed social statistics are not possible yet in Ukraine, as most official data are still too “Soviet” and avoid the subject of class separation, but there are recent sociological studies that cast light on the middle class with attempts at definition, estimates of numbers, and comparisons with other countries. Depending on the source, estimates range wildly from about 5 percent to not quite 50 percent of the population, and show either little change over a recent ten-year period or steady growth in Ukraine’s middle-class population. What is not at issue is that Kyiv is in the lead in Ukraine in terms of its middle-class population.

Not only does Kyiv have a middle class, but there is also what looks at least a little like a familiar middle-class suburbia in the residential ring. As is common of Europe, more people live in multi-unit structures than in single homes, but there are quite a few fine single dwellings that might be Ukraine’s architectural variants on middle-class suburban housing in the West nonetheless, as well as many nice-looking apartment and condominium complexes in pleasant settings for middle-class family life. As we have seen, some of these homes are built out of older Soviet-era apartments or dacha allotments, but many other are brand new on newly urbanized ground or where redevelopment has taken place. Furthermore, as we have seen, everywhere there are advertisements that promote such a landscape: billboards along city streets and along interurban highways that show new apartment complexes or planned developments of single homes in green settings, advertising posters in buses and in subway cars, leaflets that are handed out on sidewalks or that are inserted into newspapers and magazines, and ads in print and television media. If you agree to go into long-term debt, you too can partake in the new society. What can be more emblematic of a campaign to promote the promise of a middle-class lifestyle than Figure 9.1, the earlier photograph of the bus that is itself an ad asking people to start “living like a European.”

We look at Kyivans themselves and see among the population a comfortable prosperity. A great many people are attentive to fashion and are nicely dressed. We see them on the subways and buses with shopping bags from upscale stores, moving to the beats of music heard from expensive handheld players through expensive ear phones, thumbing late-model telephones, and sliding screen after screen on new iPads and other devices. Many have also been abroad, looking not toward a less expensive or less exotic vacation in Russia, but more to the capitals in the west and center of Europe and
the beach resorts along the Mediterranean and Red Seas. Turkey, Israel, Egypt, Tunisia, and the Maldives are especially popular because of sun and uncomplicated entry. Furthermore, Ukrainians buy expensive concert tickets (Madonna recently played in Kyiv’s big football stadium; I heard Joe Cocker), speak English and other foreign languages, and are fully in tune with the latest Hollywood blockbusters and gossip, popular foreign singers and novelists, the stars of European football, and a great many other aspects of global popular culture. While some super-rich Ukrainians think that they own it all, and far, far too many Ukrainians are mired in poverty and do not share in this world, there are many, especially in Kyiv, for whom global lifestyles and middle-class consumerism are the norm.

Perhaps no place displays the middle class as vividly as a shopping mall. At the extremes, there are markets for the poor and places that only the rich can afford to frequent, but in Ukraine as in other countries, there are also modern, enclosed malls for the middle class. Kyiv has several, plus some that are under construction and will open soon. These and other malls are found on both sides of the river, in residential areas, and in the center, and are typically quite popular. As happens as well in other countries where English is not the main language, the names of malls are often in English and are written only in Latin alphabet. The same applies for most of the stores, although there are also store names that are in French, Italian, and other languages. Clothing and accessories outlets predominate, but there are also other kinds of shops and food courts with worlds of cuisine. Most of the stores are Ukrainian- or Russian-owned chains, but there are also stores from Western Europe, the United States, and Japan. As in the United States and elsewhere, malls have two or three levels, large stores as anchors, and small kiosk-type establishments in atrium spaces that sell inexpensive jewelry, doo-dads for mobile telephones, and other items. The sales staff consists mostly of young people who hope to earn enough to be shoppers in stores nearby, while most of the shoppers are other young people and young families with children. With the exception of a custodial staff of older women who clean public restrooms and the like, there are very few or no oldsters employed at the mall, most certainly not as sales staff or at cash registers. Perhaps this adds to the image of mall “middle-classedness,” since in a prosperous society both grandma and grandpa should be either shoppers or at home enjoying hobbies and rest. Shopping malls in the center of the city like Globus Mall at Independence Square and Metrograd in the underground near the feet of “Bessarabian Lenin” are dependent on shoppers from the subway system, while more distant malls are primarily automobile-oriented and have sprawling parking lots or multilevel garages.
At Lybidska Station on the Metro a new shopping mall that is now in advanced stages of construction promises to revive the economy of a tired industrial district. It is being called Ocean Plaza and will be themed by an aquarium as anchor.

Dream Town has everything. It is my favorite Kyiv mall because it is in many ways original despite the generic nature of malls in general, and is a great place for watching nice people having fun. The name of the center is hokey, but it conveys something positive about Kyiv nonetheless. The crowds are happy. We see friends and family members enjoying themselves while shopping or simply hanging around. I have taken non-Ukrainian guests to this mall just to show a different face of Kyiv: a city without the extremes of poverty and “New Russian” arrogance, and without rudeness, dour faces, graffiti, grime, and crumbling stone that is too common elsewhere. The place is, simply, normal.

The mall is in Obolon (Kravets and Sovsun, 2012), and was put together in stages over 2008-2011. It was superimposed on the median strip between opposing traffic lanes of Obolonskyi Prospekt, the central boulevard that Soviet planners had designed through the heart of this large zone of mikrorraion districts, and stretches for about 540 meters (1,772 feet) from near the Obolon Metro station to near Minska Station. It is anchored at one end by a large supermarket and sporting goods store, and that the other end by, hooray, a sizable bookstore. In between are well over 200 other stores, kiosks, restaurants, cafés, and other businesses on three levels that make Dream Town a shoppers’ or browsers’ paradise. The third level is most fun, because in addition to restaurant choices that range from sushi to the cuisine of an American Western-style saloon, there is a world of recreation: a roller rink, an ice rink, bumper cars, a simulated space capsule ride, a bowling alley, kiddy rides, a games arcade, and (trust me, I am not making this up) a regulation-sized sheet for playing what is known as “that roaring game,” curling. Nearby is a small zoo with live animals and next to that is a shooting range where enthusiasts can fire “real guns.”

Also distinctive about Dream Town are its five “exotic zones.” That is my term for the tacky but good clean fun theme park-like décor for the escalator and elevator areas. Each area has as a centerpiece a café that sports the zone’s distinctive theme. Zone 1, near the “Oscar” multiplex movie theater, suggests Hollywood with its giant King Kong figure, a big fiberglass dinosaur, a flying Spiderman, a suspended Batman, and bevies of sizable Oscar statuettes and mock movie cameras. The next exotic zone is a jungle environment. There are “realistic-looking” plastic crocodiles, an enormous python wound around a tree limb, a waterfall, and plastic palm trees, plastic
ferns, and plastic moss. Zone 3 is Asia or China: There is a pagoda, “Ming” vases, a large Chinese lantern suspended from the ceiling, and faux bamboo framing for the mall's elevators. The fourth zone is either ancient Greece or ancient Rome, or possibly both: There are Corinthian columns, charioteers, a fountain with a statue of Poseidon, and a world of Greek gods and Greek art. Zone 5 (as we move from south to north) is a parody of Paris with a mock Eiffel Tower, the stained glass of Notre-Dame Cathedral, Napoleon's crest, and gargoyles who watch us as we sit in a sidewalk café. It all echoes Las Vegas without the gambling. It is much more cheaply built, but is fun nonetheless. A generation ago, there were only government stores and portraits of V. I. Lenin to enjoy.

9.4 Four Photographs

In order to illustrate the changes in the residential ring, I selected four additional photographs for this section. Figure 9.3 looks west from the roof of a late-Soviet-period apartment building that is located at an edge of the

Figure 9.3  Troyeshchyna village and parking garages from the roof of a high building
sprawling high-rise residential complex on the Left Bank named Troyeshchyna. The high-rises of the Right Bank are seen in the far background across the Dnipro (also visible, but faintly). The large middle ground is what is left of the green village of Troyeshchyna that predates the high-rise landscape. There are fields, small farm houses, smaller outbuildings, and tall trees, as well some larger structures that have intruded more recently amid them as comfortable homes in the “suburbs.” The new houses that are clustered in the center of the photograph on the far side of the high wall are oversized “suburban” homes on undersized plots that had once been part of village Troyeshchyna. Some or all of them were probably erected by a developer on speculation, while others are homes that people put up for themselves on land they had bought from a speculator. The structures that are arranged in the horizontal pattern in the foreground are parking garages for private automobiles. They are rented spaces, but some could also be owned, and some could be used to store belongings other than an automobile. There are hundreds of spots in this garage complex. It provides secure, gated, and guarded parking for owners of cars who live in the high-rise buildings such as the one from which I took the photograph. While some people might use

Figure 9.4  Traffic circle and Metro terminus at Heroiv Dnipra, north of the city center
their automobile daily, garages such as these serve primarily the weekend driver. It could be a good 15-20 minute walk between home and garage, so parking complexes such as this one have little appeal for most daily automobile commuters.

Figure 9.4 was taken in a residential complex called Heroiv Dnipra (Heroes of the Dnipro) at the end of a subway line on the Right Bank. Most of what we see was built in the Soviet 1980s as new, improved housing for Kyiv’s upwardly mobile citizens. The subway stop is beneath the circle and is designed as the hub of the neighborhood. Wide streets extend from the traffic circle around the Metro circle and lead to various planned mikroraiion developments in all directions, each of which houses thousands of residents. Units within the buildings are now privately owned. Some of them are quite large and spectacular in design, although that cannot be seen from the outside, while elsewhere the apartments might be decrepit and old-fashioned, and common areas might be in poor repair. This photograph also shows the landscapes of commerce and automobiles. We see various small businesses both within and outside the central circle, cars parked

Figure 9.5 New residential high-rises, commercial strips, billboards, and harsh distances for pedestrians in the Osokorky neighborhood on the Left Bank
every which way, and billboards on sturdy standards. Small shops and kiosks crowd competitively along the walkways that connect the Metro circle with adjacent mikroraiions.

Figure 9.5 looks across a slice of the Left Bank Osokorky district along a stretch of a wide highway (Brovarskyi Prospekt) between Osokorky and Pozniaky Metro Stations. This is a fairly new district with considerable ongoing construction. We see busy traffic on the road, tall new apartment and condominium buildings beyond, a series of new commercial structures (offices and shopping) at their feet, and a rising forest of billboards. The foreground, by contrast, is a world of pedestrians on long walks to the subway or bus stops, and some of the small, table-top businesses that serve them. The pedestrian who does not own an automobile is at a disadvantage, as the scale of the neighborhood and the distances involved are better suited for automobiles. Windy days, driving rains, the colds of winter, the summer heat and humidity all make this a miserable world for pedestrians. It seems ironic that such a difficult terrain was conceived by Soviet planners before people in any numbers owned automobiles; at least there was equality of suffering.

Figure 9.6 Kyiv relaxing. The photo is of the walk along the beach in Obolon.
Finally, Figure 9.6 shows the middle class at rest. The scene is from Obolon, the Right Bank residential area in Kyiv beside the Dnieper that was mentioned above. It is not far from the Dream Town shopping center. The area was developed in Soviet times as a mikroraiion for the masses, but has since emerged as a distinctively middle-class area and, in parts, as one with a bit of cachet and wealth. Locational advantages are that the area is easily accessible to the center and that it borders the river. There are beaches and green spaces, cleaner air, and much more quiet that elsewhere in the city. The apartments nearby command higher prices, especially those with fine views. The photo shows Kyivans enjoying themselves along the pedestrian walk that parallels the river. There is a lower walk, too, that goes along the beaches and past places for volleyball, fishing, picnicking, and other activities, but this is the “high road” past restaurants and terrace cafés, where families stroll with their children, parents or grandparents wheel baby carriages, children ride bikes and scooters, people walk dogs, and vendors sell ice cream, soft drinks, beer, cotton candy, and rent bicycles. There are old men playing chess, lovers holding hands, joggers, and happy teens. The place is especially popular in the after-dinner hours during the long summer daylight of this somewhat northerly city, while on weekends young people play music, drink beer, and kiss long into the night. The scene is generally one of comfort and contentment, with people having a good time and where life is pretty much the way it is supposed to be.