Preface

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Preface

This book has taken shape over many years, as part of an ongoing consideration of the way in which society and urban form interact over time. My research focus on the suburbs was first sparked by Professor Bill Hillier, who liked to teased me, as his student on the Bartlett's MSc Advanced Architectural Studies, as being 'just a girl from Edgware' (despite my having spent much of my life till then in the suburbs of Jerusalem). This very much echoes the experience of my predecessor at the Bartlett, Ian Davis, almost exactly forty years earlier. In ‘Dunroamin’, Davis describes his own first day at the Bartlett School of Architecture in 1953, putting down 'Edgware' as his address and being advised by his tutor that he should make rapid plans to move from there to a more ‘civilised address, such as Camden Town’. Subsequently, my reading of Mark Clapson's essential histories of the working-class suburb opened my eyes up to alternative narratives of the twentieth-century suburban experience. I should also mention the series of exchanges with Vesna Goldsworthy, whose ‘The Good Life’ conference at Kingston University in 2004 formalised suburban studies as a field of academic research in its own right. Shortly after the conference Vesna and I wrote a proposal for a multidisciplinary book on suburban studies, which, although never realised, helped seed the idea for this book in its current guise.

The urban theories of Bill Hillier, Julienne Hanson and Alan Penn at the UCL Space Syntax Laboratory, Bartlett School of Architecture, have deeply influenced my thinking about how cities grow and change. Amongst many of my other colleagues elsewhere at UCL I would like to particularly mention the work on high streets by Matthew Carmona of the Bartlett School of Planning. Last, but not least, I would like to mention the vital contribution that my research colleagues Muki Haklay and Sam Griffiths have made to the creation of this book. Our weekly discussions over coffee and cake influenced my own reflections of the suburbs as being as complex as the city itself. Essential to this understanding was Muki’s thinking regarding interdisciplinary research and the nature of space in geography, as well as Sam’s urban historian’s conception of the temporality of urban form.
The financial support from the UK research councils transformed what had started off as old-fashioned scholarship – carried out alongside the myriad responsibilities of a busy academic – into two vast enterprises of scientific research. I close by acknowledging and expressing my gratitude for this support.²

Notes

1 Oliver et al. (1981: 27).
2 The two research projects in question were: