Part B. Suburban Centralities

Published by

Vaughan, Laura.
Suburban Urbanities: Suburbs and the Life of the High Street.
University College London, 2015.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/81836.

⇒ For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/81836
an indulgent 'trip down memory lane'. Nor should history only be of interest to the heritage community. There is an important role for architects and urban designers to play in understanding how the complexity of apparently quotidian places such as high streets not only creates conservation responsibilities but also presents opportunities for design that can take this complexity into account. The high street is not a repository of static meanings to be toyed with but rather a source of time–space orientations towards the world that afford social memory. Rather than present the high street as a passive object – derivative of a given phase of the 'history of events' – we might instead, following Hanson, view it as an agent of morphological or network history, a history which touches on the 'history of events' by bringing people, development and commercial activity together in ways that are not entirely predictable. High streets can then be regarded as special kinds of 'morphological events', historical sites of heightened temporal–spatial co-presence. To recall Jane Jacobs (1961: 65): ‘time is constructive quality in cities, it is the indispensable factor’. By seeking to better understand high streets as loci of continuity and change, particularly suburban high streets in their deep residential hinterlands, it is possible to gain a better sense of their contribution to built environments that are both resilient and adaptive to social change.

Notes

1 Emma Duncan (Deputy Editor of The Economist at the time of writing) is certainly a modern, see: 'Death of the high street? Hurrah … Move with the times. Turn empty shops into much needed housing' in The Observer, 27 April 2014; the ancients view of the traditional high street is more pervasive in British culture but the battle lines are well defined by the terms of the media debate over the value of Mary Portas’s High Streets Review and the popular Channel 4 series ‘Mary Portas: Queen of the High Street’ (2013) – of course no one likes being accused of nostalgia. For a more open-minded though still critical view see Hugo Rifkind, ‘Don’t mourn for the old High Street. It was awful’, The Times, 11 October 2014.


3 Paraphrased from L. P. Hartley, The Go-between (1953). The original quotation reads: ‘The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.’


5 I am grateful to Mr John Hickman for his help in sourcing original images for Figure 2.3.

6 This theme is explored empirically in Ashley Dhanani’s chapter in this volume in which he offers an analysis of London’s built form evolution.

7 David Jeveendrampillai’s chapter in this volume comments on the uses of memory – both real and mythologised – in creating community in Surbiton.

PART B

Suburban Centralities

Street network evolution of High Barnet (left-hand circle) and Loughton (right-hand circle)