

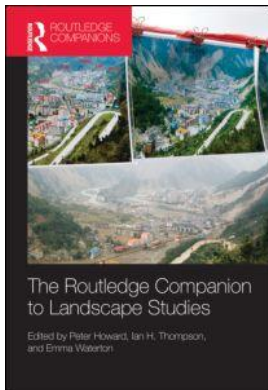
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Peri-urban landscapes: from disorder to hybridity

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Town and country may show us the surface of life with which we feel comfortable, but the interface shows us its broiling depths.

(Shoard 2000: 89)

With increasing urbanization and the rise of the private automobile, peri-urban development accelerated in the Western world in the early twentieth century. Today, peri-urban landscapes are a global phenomenon spurring land-use conflicts and challenging centuries-old ideas and ideals of city and country. Peri-urban landscapes were mainly regarded as a problem within research and planning during most of the twentieth century, but a paradigm shift occurred during its last decade with the acknowledgement of the potential of hybrid landscapes. Although the study of peri-urban landscape is an interdisciplinary and scattered field (compare the literature examined in reviews by Meeus and Gulinck 2008, Simon 2008, Taylor 2011), this chapter aims for a comprehensive overview. The chapter discusses the peri-urban concept, introduces the peri-urban discourse in (primarily) Western countries, presents key recent works in landscape studies and, finally, argues the fruitfulness of detailed and critical studies of hybrid landscapes.

The concept

With its global and interdisciplinary scope, it is scarcely surprising that the peri-urban concept has been defined in various ways. However, several common traits can be found in the definition and the intertwined characterization of the peri-urban. Peri-urban is usually defined as the interface between rural and urban within the 'urban shadow', i.e. the zone of influence of the city measured for instance as the commuter belt, or as a spatially defined girdle around the city outside its suburbs (Allen 2003, Buxton et al. 2006, Simon 2008, Marshall et al. 2009). Whereas some describe the interface only as a mix of rural and urban land uses, others emphasize constant interactions and conflicts, as well as the occurrence of rural-urban hybrids, as a marker of the peri-urban. Expectations of coming development and land speculation are equally important features and the successive transition from rural to urban land-use is normally included in the definition, particularly for the zone closest to the city, if not the more peripheral areas often

described as being affected by hidden urbanization (i.e. increasing numbers of urban commuters and increasingly urban lifestyles) and transitions from productive to post-productive land use. Suboptimal institutional structures and poorly developed infrastructure (e.g. roads and sewerage) are frequently mentioned, both of which are partly due to recent and often scattered development (Allen 2003, Simon 2008, Marshall et al. 2009). Apart from a number of concepts partly overlapping with peri-urban (e.g. exurbia, urban sprawl and counter-urbanization), *rural-urban fringe* stands out as a synonym and is treated as such in this chapter (compare definitions offered by Pryor 1968, Bryant et al. 1982, Audirac 1999, Gallent et al. 2007 with the characterization above).

Ironically, concepts such as rural-urban fringe and peri-urban are based on a dichotomous urban-rural divide that denies any middle ground, and a closer look at discourse and models illustrating the phenomenon reveals an implicit historiography of rural-urban separation. Outdated models of centripetal growth patterns and monocentric cities with an urban hinterland are used as a backdrop to explain the new phenomena of sprawling cities. In these models, the city is generally described as the driving force, whereas the country is portrayed in terms of illustrating its passivity and inevitable decline. As an alternative to these outdated models, the concept *Zwischenstadt* (between-city) captures the more complex situation of metropolitan regions (Sieverts 2003), as does the concept *porous landscapes* (Busck et al. 2008), which emphasizes the amorphous character of the fringe. Rather than defining the peri-urban vis-à-vis the location of the city centre, a focus on rural-urban interactions is more appropriate. Such a definition describes a relational space with a cartographical pattern that can vary substantially from city to city and between countries. However, since dichotomous interpretations of the phenomenon remain common, the risk of reiterating or even enhancing outdated ideas of differences between urban and rural is still present. The cosmology of city and country needs to be handled with great care when seeking a deeper understanding of the peri-urban: on the one hand, researchers can benefit from going beyond this divide in the study of the peri-urban, on the other, they have to acknowledge the importance of these categories in planning, landscape representations, statistics, etc., which to a large extent frame our interpretations of the landscape.

A characterization of the peri-urban which acknowledges such an interplay between ideals and their contested materialization (or between land and life) is offered by Audirac (1999) who describes the urban fringe as:

a rural-urban battleground for water and land, loss of farmland, wildlife, and countryside, and a refuge of the geographically mobile, who by fleeing the city, trade commuting for a mythical piece of Arcadia only to leave behind thinning central cities and inner suburbs.

(Audirac 1999: 7)

Audirac describes a relational phenomenon, which cannot be classified as place *or* process, as spatial category *or* lifestyle (see for instance the conceptual discussion in Taylor, 2011). The price we have to pay for such a relational understanding of landscape is a multi-faceted definition of phenomena such as peri-urban. Furthermore, national differences such as population density, institutional structures, socio-economic driving forces, etc., affect not only the character, but also the very idea of peri-urban: such local conditions need to be acknowledged and made explicit in landscape studies. Thus, the definition above is merely a point of departure for an inevitable examination of concepts, hidden ideologies and place-specific circumstances needed in a peri-urban landscape study (see Figure 36.1).



Figure 36.1 The peri-urban landscape of Scania, Sweden. Former farms within the commuting belt are turned into residences for commuters dreaming of a peaceful life in the countryside, or aiming to fulfil their ambition to pursue hobby farming. Sometimes labelled ‘hidden urbanization’, the transformation of the countryside is in some places nevertheless detectable due to the pastoral iconography of fences, signs, gardens, etc. (Photo: the author)

From disorder to hybridity: 100 years of peri-urban discourse

we should secure some orderly line up to which the country and town may each extend and stop definitely, so avoiding the irregular margin of rubbish-heaps and derelict building land which spoils the approach to almost all our towns to-day ...

(Unwin 1909: 163–4)

The wish for a clear divide between city and country characterizes early discourses within planning on the urban fringe. Although thoroughly planned garden cities were cherished as the ‘marriage’ between city and country, informal development in which rural and urban activities actually blended has been regarded as a problem within modern planning for more than a century. In 1928, Benton MacKaye, a spokesperson for regional planning at a time when the new mobility and settlement patterns threatened the very basis for regional geography and its rooted landscape characterizations, provided a telling illustration of urban development:

Its movements here as elsewhere we may liken to a glacier. It is spreading, unthinking, ruthless. Its substance consists of tenements, bungalows, stores, factories, billboards, filling stations, eating stands, and other structures whose individual hideousness and collective haphazardness present that unmistakable environment which we call the ‘slum’. Not the slum of poverty, but the slum of commerce. ... rural villages ... are welded together into a common suburban mass without form or articulation ... not city, not country, but

wilderness – the wilderness not of an integrated ordered nature, but of a standardized, unordered civilization.

(MacKaye 1962: 160)

The urban structure as such had predecessors: large-scale, scattered semi-urban settlements are an ancient phenomena (Yokohari et al. 2000, Simon 2008) and the existence of a wealthy population with summerhouses at the urban rim goes back centuries (Bunce 1994, Hayden 2003). However, the peri-urban landscape described by MacKaye has a decisively modern character. A crucial part of modernity is belief in the need for constant progress and the simultaneous lament of the loss of nature; in the case of MacKaye and numerous others in the peri-urban discourse, this is expressed in a deterministic belief in the expanding city and a crumbling countryside. This idea, rather than the mix of rural and urban or the existence of scattered urban settlements, distinguishes the peri-urban landscape from the pre-modern phenomenon. In the 1920s and 1930s, the emergence of a welfare society, new means of transportation (in particular the spread of the private car) and social reforms (such as statutory holidays) led to an increasing number of people in Western countries searching for peaceful and scenic places for leisure. This movement came to threaten the very same values they were looking for and (in combination with growing cities, road constructions, gravel pits, etc.) caused an increasing number of peri-urban conflicts. This nurtured a public debate on the right to the landscape and by the mid-1930s the planning debate was underway in a large number of Western countries (arguing for stronger planning, regional planning and nature or landscape protection), and the concept *urban fringe* was launched (Pryor 1968, Matless 1998, Qviström 2010).

The early twentieth-century planning debate fostered several schemes aiming for a separation of city and country, of which the green belt planning in Britain and several of its former colonies is the most important (Amati 2008, see Figure 36.2). In other countries, liberal planning facilitated escalating sprawl which triggered further criticism. In 1964, Blake published *God's Own Junkyard, the Planned Deterioration of America's Landscape*, with aerial photographs illustrating the bulldozing of the urban fringe and the rise of monotonous residential areas in its place (Blake 1964). According to Rome (2001), these powerful pictures of farmland despoliation came to influence a growing debate and resistance to suburbanization, which for instance was adopted in the seminal work on landscape planning by McHarg (1992 [1969]). Despite the dramatic growth of metropolitan regions with a porous or hybrid character, representations of peri-urban landscapes as anomalies are still part of contemporary planning, and the attempts to stigmatize these areas are usually supported by arguments echoing Unwin, MacKaye or McHarg, calling for orderly separation of nature and culture, city and country, according to modern cosmology.

The land-use conflict which has received most attention to date is that between farming and urban expansion, partly because most major cities are situated amidst highly productive farmland (Bryant et al. 1982). Arguments concerning a future lack of arable land appeared already in the 1950s, but developed into an international concern that made an impact on planning policies in the 1960s and early 1970s (Bunce 1998). This led to a vivid debate on urban sprawl and the need for urban growth boundaries, as well as urban fringe studies focusing on the impact of urban expansion on agriculture due to the clash between urban and rural land economy, speculation and land-use changes (Lawrence 1988, Hart 1991, Daniels 1999), which until recently has dominated the perspective on urban agriculture (see Freidberg 2001 and Condon et al. 2010 for another perspective). Bunce (1998) examines the ideologies of thirty years of farmland preservation discourse in North America, arguing that an odd combination of environmentalism and agrarianism lies behind the debate, with the local interest in preserving landscape amenities



Figure 36.2 The green belt of Sheffield maintains a clear divide between city and country, although intersected by new roads and other infrastructure. Green belt planning is probably the most famous response to peri-urbanization, with a peak in popularity between the 1950s and 1970s (Amati 2008). Today, new models for the urban fringe with a less clearly pronounced rural–urban divide are being sought. (Photo: Ingrid Sarlöv Herlin)

as a ‘subtext’ of increasing importance. Characteristically, the discourse is driven from an urban perspective, while ‘mainstream farm voices are barely detectable in the farmland preservation movement’ (Bunce 1998: 244).

Contemporary research captures a wide span of environmental conflicts due to peri-urbanization, with for instance von der Dunk et al. (2011) identifying no less than 45 different categories of land-use conflicts in a case study area in Switzerland. Frequent themes for examination are the fragmentation of biotopes, loss of landscape amenities and negative impacts caused by sub-optimized infrastructure systems, not least transportation and the management of water resources (see Buxton et al. 2006, Meeus and Gulinck 2008 for a review). The sheer number of land uses in need of a peri-urban location (gravel pits, waste dumps, water supplies, space-using industries, external shopping centres, truck centres, golf courses and other space-requiring facilities for outdoor recreation) could explain why the zone is primarily regarded as a problem within research (e.g. Piorr et al. 2011). However, examinations focusing exclusively on conflicts could be misleading, since opportunities and conflicts are frequently entwined. For instance, weak institutional structures open the way for global capital to derive benefit from the urban fringe, but simultaneously facilitate informal settlement by local actors (Freidberg 2001). Marshall et al. (2009: 5) conclude that ‘[E]xclusions and opportunities are thus often Janus-faced: it is through the exclusion of services, of regulation, of conservation and so forth, that opportunities are created’. Even though this statement primarily concerns developing countries, the contemporary critique of modern planning in general and green-belt planning in particular indicates the more general relevance of their conclusions.

The above-mentioned paradoxes of planning at the fringe have been examined within planning research. With the seminal studies on the English green belt by Peter Hall in the 1960s and 1970s, the model for green-belt planning began to be criticized (Amati 2008). Inspired by actor–network theory, Murdoch and Lowe (2003) illustrate how attempts to keep city and country apart nurtured a paradoxical development, ‘once the planning system acted to differentiate urban from rural areas, it was noticed that the population was moving in increasing numbers from urban to rural areas to take advantage of the preserved countryside’ (Murdoch and Lowe 2003: 323). In particular, people in favour of a clear divide are those most prone to transgress the divide by moving to the countryside. Similar studies illustrating the paradoxical consequences of implementations of rural–urban division have added to the criticism of former planning and the arguments for a new, hybrid approach to the urban fringe (e.g. Qviström 2007, Cadieux 2008, Condon et al. 2010), whereas Yokohari et al. (2000) and de Block and Polasky (2011) offer historical examples beyond this divide, suggesting these examples could provide knowledge for future planning.

Ex-urban migrants and the push-and-pull mechanisms leading them to the countryside have been studied since the early 1960s (Pryor 1968, Taylor 2011). Among the pull mechanisms, a set of landscape-related values stand out: opportunities for outdoor leisure, a ‘natural’ environment, peace and quiet, rural lifestyle, picturesque views, a benign environment in which to raise children, more ‘space’ and freedom (Swaffield and Fairweather 1998, Millburn et al. 2010, see also Mahon et al., 2012). Following Swaffield and Fairweather (1998), these arguments reveal the dream of an Arcadian landscape (cf. Marx 2000). The dream is to a large extent realized with second homes, which in some countries have played a crucial role in peri-urban development (Hall and Müller 2004). Research on amenity migration have contributed to an understanding of the driving forces for this development as well as of the conflicts between different lifestyles caused by this movement (see Gosnell and Abrams 2011 for a review). Ghose (2004) illustrates how the new population causes escalating house prices and thus rural gentrification, with commodification of space, displacement of previous residents, new land uses and, in the long run, a landscape with a new identity. However, recent research questions the idea of ‘two cultures’ (i.e. the collision between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ population), and aims instead to diversify the picture of the peri-urban considering the economic base of the agricultural sector in peri-urban areas, as well as the differentiated socioeconomic pattern due to commuters living in the countryside (Busck et al. 2008, Robbins et al. 2009).

During the last decades of the twentieth century, alternative interpretations of the urban fringe evolved, arguing for the recognition of specific values in the vernacular, messy or multifunctional landscapes (Shoard 2000, Gallent et al. 2007, Meeus and Gulinck 2008). Outdoor recreation has been proffered as one of the main arguments, and, whereas urban forestry has provided successful models for multifunctionality or land-use strategies combining production and consumption (Terada et al. 2010), the recent interest in urban agriculture, together with various art projects, has facilitated a critique of the normative rural–urban divide and its related aesthetics (e.g. Blauvelt 2008). This shift in focus is related to a general criticism of modern planning (e.g. mono-functional land use) and to the post-modern interest in marginality, in-between spaces and ruins (e.g. Gallent et al. 2007). Studies of this liminal landscape and its unplanned development could help locate models and interpretations of the peri-urban beyond the modern divides of nature and culture, and thus provide the seeds of sustainable development (e.g. Terada et al. 2010).

As part of the turn towards an interest in the values of the peri-urban landscape, a rich flora of new concepts has developed, clinging to the idea that new metaphors offer new ways of seeing and thus new ways of understanding this elusive landscape (Hayden 2004, Blauvelt

2008), although Hayden (2003) argues that this jungle of new concepts obscures the history of their development, and thus limits our ability to reveal the complexity of hybrid landscapes. Whereas some authors settle for the invention of a new concept, Rowe (1991) and Sieverts (2003) offer fully fledged stories, or cosmologies, of the new landscape, aiming for principles for planning and design beyond the rural–urban divide. Sieverts (2003) in particular illustrates how a new metaphor when combined with investigations and stories about the new landscape can make a substantial impact on planning discourse.

The peri-urban debate was dominated by a Western paradigm during the twentieth century, but alternative views have now emerged. In the late 1980s, Terry McGee (in collaboration with Norton Ginsburg) coined the term *desakota*, based on the Indonesian words *desa* (village) and *kota* (town), in order to capture an Asian form of semi-urban landscape defined as ‘regions of an intense mixture of agricultural and non-agricultural activities that often stretch along corridors between large city cores’ (McGee 1991: 7). Although McGee differentiates between *desakota* and peri-urban regions, the concept has been helpful in conceptualization of the urban fringe beyond the rural–urban divide imposed by colonial planning (Yokohari et al. 2000, Marshall et al. 2009).

In recent years studies within political ecology have contributed a much needed critical approach to the politics of the peri-urban (Robbins et al. 2009). Walker and Fortmann (2003) provide a detailed account of the political struggle over the right to the landscape in a peri-urban county in California, with conflicts between nature preservation and land use at its centre. Arguing that ideas of landscape are key to an understanding of the complex conflict, they explore tensions between different actors in their way of valuing scenery and wildlife, traditional culture and property rights, and their attitudes towards spatial planning and rural gentrification. Their paper also illustrates the complex power relations characterizing the peri-urban landscape, with global actors influencing both sides of the conflict (see also Freidberg 2001).

Challenges for the future

As Crankshaw (2009: 219) argues, ‘exurban development is most often defined critically, not by its internal character as a landscape but externally, as something that destroys a preferred land use’. The preoccupation with a rural–urban divide has nurtured studies of urbanization and the loss of farmland rather than studies of the peri-urban landscape as such (Qviström 2007). However, the peri-urban landscape is an everyday environment for a large and increasing proportion of the population. Landscape research has the responsibility to examine this vernacular landscape, and inform policy-makers of conflicts as well as opportunities for new land-use regimes. Historical and ethnological studies are needed to gain an understanding of recent history and everyday life in order to capture peri-urban cultural heritage and identity (e.g. Mahon et al., 2012). Furthermore, inspired by Marx (2000), Rowe (1991) argues the need to develop a poetic of the middle landscape, i.e. a thematic framework for the design of the peri-urban landscape. Not until a nuanced discussion on the aesthetics, ethics and identity of the peri-urban has developed will a thorough analysis of its potential be possible.

This chapter emphasizes the contested character of peri-urban landscapes, which needs to be taken into account when searching for a middle landscape. Despite the recent fascination with hybrid landscapes, the city edge remains an ‘irregular, discontinuous zone of dissonance’ and ‘a jumble of contradiction’ (Hart 1991: 35), with land-use conflicts that need to be addressed. Due to the limited number of previous studies of the peri-urban landscape on its own terms, studies prying beneath the ‘surface’ of the vague or arbitrary land-use categories offered by



Figure 36.3 Lake Stoibermühle, a former gravel pit next to Munich airport. The noise from a motorway and aircraft accompanies that of birds and children. Landscape research has gone from lamenting the mix of rural and urban to attempts to understand and explore the everyday peri-urban landscape as such, to reveal its values as well as its contested character and power relations. (Photo: the author)

cartographical studies or superficial observations are particularly needed. Studying the tensions between the dreams of the countryside and everyday life or the partial materialization of an Arcadian ideology is one way to capture the contested character. By triangulating different methodologies or sources, a complex and contested image of the peri-urban can be achieved (e.g. Crankshaw 2009). If dualisms such as the idea of ‘two cultures’ are avoided, rich case studies could provide local knowledge of the complexity of driving forces and power relations shaping the land (see Robbins et al. 2009 for suggestions on themes for critical studies beyond this divide). Furthermore, as Walker (2007) puts it, city and country develop in tandem. Hence, a symmetrical analysis is needed that not only considers the city as a driving force but also, for instance, the dramatic restructuring and globalization of agriculture and forestry.

Peri-urban landscape studies are also needed in order to assess the environmental consequences of modernity in general and modern planning in particular. As Shoard (2000) notes, this is a perfect entry point into the ‘broiling depths’ of modern society. The wish for a separation of nature and culture, city and country, has created hybrid landscapes which have largely been disregarded within research and planning to date. Although thorough studies have been carried out concerning green belts, the impacts of implementing the dichotomies of modern society through planning warrant further examination. We will never understand peri-urbanity unless we acknowledge the central role of modernity, including the effects of modern categories and ideals, on peri-urban development and landscape imaginaries.

The contestation, the driving forces and the assets of the fringe, is to a large extent related to *landscape*, provided that the breadth of the concept is recognized and applied (Qviström, 2010). Amenity migration is closely related to landscape values and countryside ideals, while conflicting landscape ideals and arguments concerning the right to the landscape are at the epicentre of peri-urban conflicts. With tensions between different interpretations of, and claims to, the landscape as a focal point, an intricate weave of discourse, everyday practice and materiality can be revealed. A shift from studies of rural–urban conflicts to contests over the right to landscape would facilitate a far wider understanding of the complexity of the conflicts (Walker and Fortmann 2003). If both the production *and* consumption of landscape are taken into consideration, further exploration into the landscape theory of the peri-urban is a fruitful path, not only in order to gain a deeper understanding of the middle landscape but also to extend our understanding of the modern landscape in general (see Figure 36.3).

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