

RURALITY NEAR THE CITY

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EDITORIAL PAPER

RURALITY NEAR THE CITY

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1. CLARIFICATION OF A THEME

Rurality near the city. This theme feels like a paradoxical statement. It so happens that, according to the most definitions of rurality, the mere proximity of urban conditions seems to be sufficient to cancel the qualification “rural”. But such a common view is exactly what this publication wants to challenge. The starting statement is that rurality should *not* be subjected to the proximity of urban functions or elements. As well as it is accepted that urban elements may be sprawled far into the countryside, rural elements may exist intimately close to or even within urban fabric. The clue then is to help - in cultural and political sense - the urban and the rural condition reaching equal levels of importance and progress. This attitude was the rationale for the Conference “Rurality near the City” (Leuven, February 7-8th, 2008), resulting in this publication. The conference was organised by an assembly of Flemish networks and institutions with a shared interest in rural issues, agriculture (and land use in general), landscape, environment and spatial planning. It was attended by a number of European experts.

Rural close to urban is often categorized as “semi-urban” or “rurban”. Besides focusing on the semi-urban condition in its broader geographical sense, the organizing committee of the conference also wanted to focus more specifically on open spaces, very close to and often locked into urban fabric. The condition of “rurality near the city” occurs all over the world where agglomerations tend to expand or where sprawl consolidates into a dense network of development. In such spatially tight conditions, open space functions need specific adaptations in order to survive, or at the contrary can be unique assets in an urban context and need a clear vision to fulfill an essential role in an urban context. “Urban agriculture” is such an item that is gaining momentum in many parts of the world. Several papers in this issue describe examples of this urban form of agriculture.

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The conference also wanted to present Flanders as a laboratory for investigating “rurality near the city” and to learn from foreign expertise and examples concerning this topic. Finally, it wanted to probe the possibility to develop or strengthen networks of expertise across the national and regional borders. This editorial paper tries to link the different points of attention brought forward by the contributors of this conference, completed by a broader literature referencing. References made to conference presentations, workshops or invited papers of the conference will be in bold.

2. ANALYSING RURALITY NEAR THE CITY

2.1. The semi-urban context

An important issue in the rural-urban discourse is the phenomenon of semi-urban areas and their strongly mixed land use characteristics (Mattingly, 1999; Gulinck and Meeus, 2004; Allen, 2006; Bowyer-Bower, 2006; Dangalle and Närman, 2006). It becomes problematic to make a distinction between rural and urban functions (Dwyer and Childs, 2003; Tacoli, 2003; Antrop, 2004). Recently, academic and professional circles have challenged conservative views on rurality and urbanity as separate systems, on specific rural and urban land use categories and on rural development as a predominantly agricultural business. Three major concepts allow encompassing the range of categories and discourses applied in literature concerning semi-urban areas: the *urban fringe* concept, *urban sprawl* and the *semi-urban landscape*.

The urban fringe is an urban-rural transition area, a belt-like zone around the urban core, forming a complex and hybrid landscape. A related term is “peri-urban area”. Allen and Dávila (2002) define the peri-urban area as an interface with a mosaic of agricultural and urban ecosystems, subjected to rapid change and with a large social mix (Allen, 2003). Quoting Natural England¹, “The countryside in and around our towns and cities (CIAT)”, the rural-urban fringe, is the area of countryside closest to where most people live. It is a place where rural and urban influences meet and mingle to create a distinctive and dynamic landscape. This place could be managed and used to improve the everyday lives and prospects of millions of people, and yet is too often neglected by policy makers, planners and others”. Especially farmers living in or near the urban fringe are subjected to important pressures (Ryan and Walker, 2004). So this fringe approach in general tends to carry negative connotations, although some authors at the contrary see positive qualities and potential in the fringe (Gallent et al., 2004). A second approach of semi-urban areas refers to semi-urban areas as “urban sprawl”. Sprawl implies a spatial and temporal process, extending over large areas and more loosely related to core urban areas. The European Environmental Agency (2006) however defines sprawl in a sense closer to fringe, as a ‘physical pattern of low-density expansion of urban areas, under market conditions, mainly into the surrounding agricultural areas’. Whatever its specific expression, inefficient land-consuming urban development - both as process and as state - is seen as a big challenge (European Environmental Agency, 2006; Heimlich and

¹ <http://www.countryside.gov.uk/LAR/Landscape/CIAT/Index.asp>

Anderson, 2001). Thompson and Prokopy (2008) discuss urban sprawl in relation to farmland preservation policy.

As a third approach, the semi-urban area can be interpreted as a specific landscape with its own characteristics, in which less exclusive emphasis is given a) to the process of change from rural to urban, b) to the urban elements in this process, and c) to the topological relationship to a core urban area. More attention can be given to the overall and mixed landscape mosaic and more equilibrated weight to its open space and rural components. Adell (1999) already described the peri-urban zones as distinctive areas of agricultural and non-agricultural activity. Also Antrop and Van Eetvelde (2000) define the urban fringe as a landscape in its own right. Beauchesne and Bryant (1999) see the urban fringe as an area that favors specific semi-urban entities like urban agriculture and alternative forms of agriculture, such as organic farming, and not just as a transition between an urban and rural landscape. Masuda and Garvin (2008) emphasize the urban-rural interface as a particular space, in which specific policies may emerge.

The concept of “neo-rural spaces” has been introduced by Gulinck (2004) as a category that ignores distance to urban elements, or demographic and built-up density as core criteria. It rather focuses on the capacities of “unsealed land”, whatever its location or size may be, for such diverse functions as food processing, water harvesting, carbon sequestration, or biodiversity conservation. Included in this concept are actors and stakeholders that find professional or ideological ground in the sustainability of this area, close to or far away from urban conditions.

The classical idea to see the semi-urban and fringe conditions as a transient stage in place and time differs fundamentally from the approach of the semi-urban area as a specific landscape with distinct features and potentials, eventually stabilising over time. Compared with these fringe and sprawl concepts, the landscape approach is more neutral in interpretation, without the strong bias to the urban facet of the phenomenon. Eventually it implies more constructive and optimistic standpoints.

Specific emerging land use categories are one category of characteristics of semi-urban areas. For instance, “horse keeping for recreation” is such a rapidly expanding land use, more particularly near residential and urban areas. One hesitates to put it under “agriculture” or under “recreation”. This hesitation challenges at the same time the identity of the latter categories. Other even more challenging conditions may be the relative absence of natural and visual qualities and heritage, compared to more “pure” rural or urban areas. Very often, semi-urban landscapes lack coherence or critical space for certain functions or have other handicaps related to their fragmentation. Some authors focus on strong visual impacts in semi-urban landscapes (Kaplan et al., 2006). Semi-urban areas are typical settings for NIMBY-related problems (Pol et al., 2006). A high density of population of newcomers and traditional inhabitants combined with the typical land use mix is a recipe for conflicting opinions related to new developments, or even for intolerance to both traditional (e.g. pesticide use) and innovative (e.g. wind turbines) activities and constructions.

Despite intellectual efforts to acknowledge specific semi-urban conditions, the categorical divide between rural and urban stays deeply embedded in culture, policy and planning. A statutory divide between the city and the countryside, between urban and rural areas, has become a misleading metaphor that strongly simplifies reality. The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO, 2007) states that it is not possible to draw a clear border between urban and rural areas. Keith (1990) was one of the first to state that a statutory distinction between urban and rural is counterproductive.

Thinking in terms of a continuum of rural and urban features, both in the physical and organisational sense, is been thought of as more realistic. Tacoli (1998) states that the city and the countryside are stronger connected than generally assumed. Relations and interactions form a complex web of connections and this in a landscape that is neither urban nor rural (Tacoli, 2003). Also Lewis and Brabec (2005) confirm that the interaction between urban and rural areas tends to be neglected on a regional scale. Leinfelder (2007) has elaborated this theme relating it to the specific Flemish urbanising context.

In all these cases, the linkage between urban and rural - both as functional interaction and spatial cohabitation - was at the core of attention. These urban – rural relations were also brought into focus during the conference that challenged the contributors in seeking arguments, opportunities and undiluted values of the “rural” component in the urban-rural gradient. This search is at odds with the predominant perception that “rurality” fades away with the presence or neighborhood of urban conditions.

2.2. A place for rurality...

Dimitris Diakosavvas focuses on the economic side of the rural story in (semi-)urbanised areas and the role of agricultural policies. He sees the rural - urban - peri-urban situations not as problem areas. The complex semi-urban area offers challenges and opportunities for rural development. Rural areas should not be seen as economical weaker than (semi-)urban areas, but as more diverse in many ways. As elsewhere in Europe after several boosts coinciding with a.o. the MacSharry reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP – the agricultural policy of the European Union), also Flanders was challenged to define its Rural Development policy.

Developing such a policy for Flanders might seem at odds with the reality as perceived from a European perspective: hardly any basic district in Flanders can be considered as “rural” according to demographic density or even other rural criteria. According to the OECD definition, there are less than 150 inhabitants per km² in rural areas, so only a small 10% of Flanders can be defined as rural. Cazaux et al. (2007) state that the amount of rural area in Flanders is diminishing, fragmented and in competition with demands from infrastructure, housing, and economic activities, and that the quality of the environment, of biodiversity and landscape turn out to be under serious threat. But activities such as farming, nature conservation, rural tourism, forestry and others are still alive and kicking there, enough for the development of a rural policy tailored to its specific conditions.

The European integrated research project PLUREL (Peri-urban LandUse RELationships) wants to achieve sustainability assessment tools for peri-urban land use relationships and effective strategies for the planning of these areas. In her proceeding, **Tanja Tötzer** (Austrian Research Center) gives an outline of the PLUREL project and an introduction to the first results. These results include a typology that explicitly acknowledges the peri-urban areas. PLUREL offers, above all, a reference framework for research agendas and policy development concerning the peri-urban areas.

2.3. ... and more specifically for agriculture

FAO (2007) defines urban agriculture (UA) as ‘the growing of plants and the raising of animals for food and other uses within and around cities and towns, and related activities such as the production and delivery of inputs, processing and marketing of products, subdivision in intra-urban and peri-urban agriculture’. Typical forms of inner urban agriculture are community gardens, home gardens and even roof top gardens. Such agriculture and horticulture is generally more small-scaled and subsistence-oriented than agriculture in the periphery or peri-urban agriculture. Still, both urban and peri-urban agriculture are seen by FAO as permanent and integral parts of the urban economic, social and ecological system. They make use of urban resources and are strongly influenced by urban conditions such as land use policies, competition for land and the urban market. According to Jarosz (2008), globalisation of food is part of the development of local food systems and provides opportunities to small-scale farms, especially in proximity to urban areas (interesting to note that the title of her paper is “City in the Countryside”, the reverse of the title of this conference and editorial paper). Under the speaking title “Agropolis”, Mougeot (2005) compiles global social, political and environmental dimensions of urban agriculture.

In the sprawled area, the place for agriculture may be even more threatened than in the fringe, since the relationships with the urban centers is somewhat less clearly expressed, just like the assets of this vicinity. In Sint-Katelijne-Waver, a strongly fragmented municipality in Flanders where agriculture is focused on horticulture and cultivation under glass, 58 % of the area of sample areas demarcated as ‘agricultural land’ is filled up with other functions than agriculture (Duytschaever, 2008). This illustrates some key problems in peri-urban areas: the competition for land (rural gentrification) and the difficulty in organising and sustaining agriculture next to other open air functions.

According to **Dimitris Diakosavvas**, agriculture is a weaker player in the economic sphere, but it stays an important actor in open space. For example, in the case of the lower appraisal of farmland compared with building land, the valuable rural amenities supplied by farmland can compensate the economic weaker position of farmland. Agricultural policies should be based on a multisectoral approach with an increase of the competitiveness of rural areas as a whole. Agricultural policy more and more links agricultural support with rural development and cross-compliance conditions. A challenge particularly for agriculture in urbanizing areas is the changing relationships to the surrounding environment. The community changes from a rural to a more urban lifestyle, generating altered expectations and rules. Diakosavvas quotes pollution as an

example. The evaluation and abatement of pollution generated by agriculture cannot be seen isolated from the surroundings. This leads to problems for agriculture that range from neighbors complaining about smell over changed conditions for the allowance of a construction permit to stringent standards concerning environmental issues just because of urban vicinity.

The changing society around the farmer and the effects of this on the management of farms constitutes the core issue of the workshop '*Challenges of farming near the city*' chaired by **Ewald Wauters**. In his workshop, Wauters addresses four main questions concerning agriculture nearby cities: (i) Do we need agriculture in urban areas? (ii) Why do we need agriculture? (iii) What is the future of urban agriculture? and (iv) What policy options are there? A provoking thesis expressed in this workshop is the following: "the development of rural areas in the frame of current rural policy is driven by the needs of the urban system, more than by the needs of farmers and the rural population".

Many authors confirm the assets for agriculture in urbanized areas. The vicinity of the city offers a large market, a better access to more and qualitative information and to better business possibilities. Also the provided infrastructure with possibilities for transport, and the opportunity to anticipate on new demands of (urban) consumers are seen as advantages of the vicinity of urbanity (Van Huylenbroeck et al., 2007). Urbanised areas give opportunities to start up multifunctional businesses (Ilbery, 2001; Van Huylenbroeck et al., 2007). These statements might be projected into the concept of "city region" (Kunzman, 2003).

3. STRATEGIES FOR RURALITY NEAR THE CITY

When rurality is being threatened by urbanity (high land values and land speculation, fragmentation, NIMBY attitudes etc.), approaches aiming at the safeguarding and development of rurality under strong urban influences need to be developed. Throughout the papers presented in this editorial issue, three main strategic lines to achieve this safeguarding and development can be distinguished. The first strategy line is about land use planning principles, the second about territorial concepts and the third is situated more in the socio-economic sphere.

3.1. According to plan

The spatial dimension of rurality near the city is expressed in the challenges for spatial planning. During the workshop '*Spatial planning challenges*', **Hans Leinfelder** and **Elke Vanempten** took their participants on a search for answers on three topics: planning story lines, coalitions of stakeholders and the institutionalisation of story lines. With respect to the first topic 'planning story lines', the participants of the workshop were unanimous about the need for more spatial planning in rural-urban fringes. The idea of 'open space' as a 'public space' has been mentioned as a potential and promising approach (Leinfelder, 2007). The participants also stressed the lack of bravery in approaching 'rurality near the city' from a rural viewpoint.

Concerning the place of stakeholders within the spatial planning story, the participants of this workshop saw opportunities to strengthen the social capital by the exchange of knowledge, the consolidation of relations and the development of mobilizing capacity between private entrepreneurs, governments and citizens. The main reason for the dominant top-down approach in the Flemish spatial planning is the lack of tradition of working with a bottom-up principle. Examples however show that there is a planning potential at the bottom level.

As for the institutionalisation of the story lines, it is noted that the principle of functional zoning of areas near city should be reconsidered. Moir et al. (1997) already stated that the combination of multifunctional agriculture and the preservation of an attractive countryside around the city should be ensured by means of more flexible planning instruments. In their report about the survival strategies for a multifunctional agriculture in urbanized areas, Van Huylenbroeck et al. (2005) follow this point of view and indicate the need of an adjustment of the rigid planning instruments. Allaert et al. (2006) declare an integrated vision as the potential strength for spatial planning. These authors state that such an approach can enjoy support from society. As this approach can trigger a change of attitude by dwellers of rural areas, it has a lot of potential strengths for planning in the future (Allaert et al., 2006).

During the workshop '*Spatial planning challenges*', it was concluded that spatial planners should no longer start from a need to allocate functions and activities to well-defined zones, but from a more holistic point of view with the landscape as a medium. Such an approach where landscape (design) is seen as an intermediary between territory and stakeholders, between urban and rural, between economy and ecology, ... has been the guiding principle of the workshop '*Searching and restoring landscape quality*', organized by **Kelly Shannon**. Within this approach, both the complexity of the territory and historical features have secured a position in landscape design. Landscape design has the possibility to serve as a negotiation tool between conflicting expectations of stakeholders and between scales within a multiple scaled and/or multiple land use accommodation. The added value of the landscape can be taken into account whenever it concerns image quality, economy, Climate change for example can be used as a new qualifier within the framework of a landscape medium.

A clear example of a challenged spatial planning is given by **Henrik Vejre**, who describes the evolution of the open space near Copenhagen, Denmark, and the delicate private/public balance in its development. A powerful 'Green fingers wedge' principle is used to guard the spatial quality of the open space in the metropolitan area. It originated from the geographical and morphological structure of linear urban development following principal roads, with open green spaces in-between. Throughout the years, different stakeholders, ranging from authorities to individuals, have anticipated in different ways on this structure. Variations in the balances between public and private initiatives, centralized and decentralized policies, consequently resulted in different developments. Whereas centralized decisions lead to large-scaled, mainly monofunctional developments like the massive reforestation of agricultural land, private and decentralized initiatives were the key to a park like landscape filled with different

functions. The centralized decisions model excludes agriculture in favor of other functions. Within the private initiatives model, on the other hand, the agricultural space got monopolized by a strong privatization movement. Horsification and hobby farming are a few examples of private 'farming'. More than professional farmers, hobby farmers consider their open space as a private instead of a public space and leave little scope for participation of recreants and urban dwellers. As a consequence, this privatization results in an individualistic landscape where the open space exists out of closed enclaves.

According to the participants of the workshop 'Spatial planning challenges', it is this kind of conservation of open space fragments with horsekeepers and hobby farmers as a setting for urban dwellers that should be avoided. Neither of both models, public or private, has succeeded in safeguarding agriculture near Copenhagen. Professional agriculture is on the decline, so it is to be questioned if there is still a future for agriculture near the city of Copenhagen. In the Île-de-France region, **André Fleury** distinguishes green and urban fingers, comparable to the geographical fingers structure in Copenhagen. The urban fingers lead to the enclosure of open spaces and agriculture.

3.2. Keeping open space: territorial projects

As in more classical rural areas, instruments may be necessary to consolidate and adapt spaces near the city to the benefit of farming, landscape preservation and other functions. Generic ideas about open spaces under urban influence have already been generated in the Interreg projects "Sustainable Open Space I and II" (SOS – www.sos-project.org). Also the experiences generated in the Farland project (Farland, s.d.) about different types and contexts of "land development" could be solicited for their value for projects of "rurality near the city". More specific project examples were presented in this conference.

In the metropolitan area of Barcelona, the starting point for safeguarding rurality near urban areas is ensuring the continuation of agriculture. **Sonia Callau i Berenguer** presents the strength of a territorial project that also draws attention to this continuity of farming. Similar to the concept of regional parks, the agrarian park 'Parc Agrari del Baix Llobregat' (Catalunia, Spain) was created. An agrarian park should be seen as a management tool that devotes itself to a sustainable agroecosystem, from production until consumption. To be able to start up an agrarian park, two conditions need be fulfilled. First of all, a territorial base is necessary. In the example of 'Parc Agrari del Baix Llobregat', 80 % of the territorial base exists out of private areas. Contrary to the private initiatives around Copenhagen, this private territorial base does not lead to the enclosure of the agricultural land because of the collective character of the project. The second cornerstone of this project is pursuing continuity of farming in the park. To fulfill these two conditions, a strong strategic plan is needed. 'Parc Agrari del Baix Llobregat' is a good example that proves the importance of a strong idea, well-founded on agriculture as an important option for land use in metropolitan areas. The regional identity is an important strength that should be used, even as a brand. The 'Parc Agrari del Baix Llobregat' for example provides traditionally in the food supply of Barcelona.

If there is no powerful territorial idea about agriculture near urban areas, it will be subjected to a great pressure from other sectors. The Green fingers wedge principle from Copenhagen is a strong metaphor and spatial idea from an urban point of view, but is it also a powerful idea concerning the role and fate of agriculture? The agrarian park idea, applied in the metropolitan area of Barcelona, is not marked with a umbrella spatial idea, like the green fingers wedge principle in Copenhagen. Because of the condition for agricultural continuity however, it has a strong rural base.

Roland Vidal and **André Fleury** (Ecole National Supérieure du Paysage, Versailles, France) cover aspects of both the examples from Copenhagen and Barcelona. They explain a landscape architectural theory that gives agriculture a meaning in an urbanised context. The Île-de-France region, France, serves as their example. They use the concept of the ‘Parcs Natural Regionaux’ (PNR) as a tool and tried to apply it on peri-urban areas by the name ‘agriurban agriculture’. By doing so, they bring a similar concept of the park idea of Callau-Berenguer to the city edges. Furthermore, farmers often seem to have no relationships with the urban areas and only collaborate in the global economies. The agriurban concept aims at a formal and official recognition of agriurban agriculture. Agriculture in peri-urban areas should be able, by means of urban and peri-urban dwellers, to resist competitive claims on open space.

3.3. Settling in: webbing the urban – rural relations

Urban and peri-urban areas exist of more than just ‘land’. They are living spaces with specific qualities and different groups of stakeholders. These characteristics are included in the Leader concept of the Leader+ program 2000 – 2006. Leader+ calls for interesting qualities of regions, places, areas, ... that can be developed by means of different instruments and with a strong focus on partnerships and networks of experience and change. Bringing regions on the market by the creation of additional values is one of these possible instruments. This can be done by means of promotion campaigns and the launch of symbols, emblems, signs, ... that represent the area. However policies for this are decentralized, on the local level there is a need for some centralization (organization of the promotion campaign, bringing partners and entrepreneurs together, ...). The adoption of the Leader+ method for rural development in peri-urban areas is presented by **Lodewijk le Grand**. Within the Leader+ approach, policies concerning rural development and agriculture partially shifts towards the local level (European Commission Agriculture and Rural Development, 2007). The local policy level is right for the tackling of specific local problems (Ray, 1999) and therefore a vital link in an efficient rural policy (Pacione, 1996). This shift towards lower policy levels is also a recommendation made by Van Huylenbroeck et al. (2005), based on the results of a research on survival strategies for a multifunctional agriculture in the urbanised environment of the metropolitan district of Brussels.

Strategies in the socio-economic sphere take advantage of existing relations between groups of stakeholders. The importance of urban stakeholders for the survival of agriculture in areas under strong urban influences is acknowledged by different authors (Van Huylenbroeck et al., 2005; Allaert et al., 2006; Cazaux et al, 2007; Van

Huylenbroeck et al., 2007). Allaert et al. (2006) state that, if agriculture wants to have a reason for existence, it cannot be considered as a purely economic, food producing activity. Within an urban environment, agriculture should create the quality society is asking for (Allaert et al., 2006).

Cazaux et al. (2007) characterize the rural outskirts no longer as a monopoly of agriculture, but as a multidimensional production and consumption area (Potter and Tilzey, 2005) that has to fulfill different functions (Van Huylenbroeck et al., 2007). Also Maier and Shobayashi (2001) define multifunctionality as “the idea that agriculture, in addition to producing food and fiber, produces a range of other non-commodity outputs such as environment and rural amenities, and food security and contributes to rural viability.” Cazaux et al. (2007) indicates that multifunctional agriculture implies the farmer to extend his scope beyond the intrinsic food production of his activities. He should accomplish other functions to society. The authors estimated that approximately 14 % of the Flemish farmers puts at least one diversification activity in practice. Van der Ploeg (1999) is convinced that an urban environment is an ideal environment for multifunctional farms to make the most of their chances. Van Huylenbroeck et al. (2005) think that authorities should encourage measures for reducing the chain of distribution, leading to a bigger awareness on the origins and quality of food. This is also found in the policy recommendations given by Cazaux et al. (2007). By means of reducing the distribution chains, it is also possible to reduce the transport costs (economic and environmental).

Christine Aubry et al. demonstrate the possibilities of such short supply chains (SSCs) in the Île-de-France region in France. In this region, about one fifth of the farmers is engaged in at least one form of SSC. Aubry et al. supply a framework that can be used for the analysis of SSC, accompanied by three examples from the Île-de-France region of its use. The first example, the *Association pour le Maintien d'une Agriculture Paysanne* (AMAP), consists of a new form of a direct and constant food relationship between a farmer and a group of consumers. To meet the decline of farmers near the city, a new form of action with a territorial effect is started up by the consumers. Some of them created a ‘land company’ to buy land that their farmer can cultivate. This example shows that the non-territorial concept of SSC, focusing on the relations between producer and consumer, eventually could lead to an agricultural territory for agriculture near urban areas. Within the Plaine de Versailles, the second example focuses on the different forms of SSC that can be adopted, and the specific problems of each of them. One of the first demands of SSC farmers is to be known. Comparable to actions undertaken in the project of the agrarian park near Barcelona and the promoting actions in the Leader+ approach, the ‘Plaine de Versailles’ became a ‘brand’, accompanied by a publicity campaign concerning SSC and the participating farmers. The third example draws attention to the opportunities of SSC to form networks with other stakeholders than the AMAP consumers. Policy focusing on the increase of organic agriculture encounters a shortage of organic fertilizers. In the Plaine de Versailles, horse centers were identified as a local and alternative source of organic manure. The negative aspects of the privatizing aspects of horsification, noticed in Denmark, can be attenuated by the construction of a non-food SSC network between horse centers and organic farmers in the Plaine de Versailles. Due

to this, horse centers can remove their manure, while the organic farmers have a sustainable source of organic manure.

Aubry et al. consider SSC as a strong element of regional agriculture and agricultural policy, able to support the maintenance and development of agriculture near the city. The examples given above show an increase in organization of the relation between producer and consumer. Through land companies, consumers ensure the availability of land for 'their' farmer. The need for promotion of SSC leads to publicity campaigns, where the region is presented as a brand. Finally, there are different valuable partners within the region, waiting to be found. Some possible weaknesses of the SSC concept, as it is applied now in the Île-de-France region, are the sustainability concerning continuity and the structural limitations of the system: are there enough farmers to provide the expected SSC services?

A broader concept that implements the rationale of SSCs can be found with Jarosz (2008) and her work on alternative food networks (AFNs). AFN is an umbrella term that represents efforts on the spatial and social reorganisation of food production, distribution and consumption. These AFNs are commonly defined by attributes such as, among other things, the spatial proximity between farmers (like for the SSCs) and community supported agriculture (CSA). By arguing that the diversity and eventuality of AFNs can not be understood without the rural and urban contexts, Jarosz (2008) completes this definition with two place-based processes: urbanisation and rural restructuring.

An effective way for collective actors to rise against the threats of agriculture (and rurality in general) in urbanized areas is the establishment of networks. The workshop *'Linking regional to European networks concerned with urbanized rural areas'*, chaired by **Karel Lhermitte** and **Els Abts**, gives an overview of existing academic, research, policy and project driven networks that are engaged in the peri-urban issue and urbanized rural areas. The social theories behind the establishment and linking of networks are shortly elucidated. The workshop resulted in some recommendations on 'How to link regional to European networks', including an improvement of communication and co-communication, and respect towards different worlds.

Concerning the expectations from urban dwellers towards rurality, **Gaston Remmers** (Bureau Buitenkans, Netherland) explains where to find the gap between rural and urban. In his approach, Remmers focuses on an organization of urban dwellers, named 'Boerenstadswens' ("City's demand to Farmers"). The organisation resulted from a shift in urban – rural relations where urban dwellers are interested to not only visit, but also participate in the countryside. 'Boerenstadswens' lets the expectations of urban dwellers be known to the farmers. By doing so, they make it possible for the farmers to meet their expectations. This makes it possible to build a base for agriculture within the city. The onset for this organization was the realization that farmers want to diversify their farming activities with activities from which they think that they answer urban expectations. But a farmer does not reason from an urban point of view. There is a need of connectivity of knowledge. It sounds paradoxical to help the farmers by telling them what needs to be changed in the urban areas. On the contrary, agriculture can play a key role in sustainable

cities if the agricultural policies go along with urban problems. The important message Remmers hands out is the need for a link between the offers from the farmers and the expectations from the dwellers. Agricultural policies need to find their way to the expectations of urban consumers and to play along with the relation between producer and consumer. The promotion of non-governmental initiatives which concretize the link between production and consumption is another policy recommendation made by Cazaux et al. (2007).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Scrolling through literature, the great majority of analysis of semi- or peri-urban areas is made from the perspective of urban development, expressed in terminology of fringe and sprawl. Less obvious is the acknowledgement of such areas as landscapes in their own right. But it is exactly this point of view that is at the core of many of the contributions in this conference. More specifically this stance about uniqueness of a mixed urban-rural environment gives a better perspective to the possibilities for, among others, agriculture and specific societal networks making efforts to keep such areas sustainable, and to let them not evolve towards a full urban state. It is also obvious that in the discourse about open spaces in strongly urbanised contexts, such as in spaces enclaved by urban fabric, many answers seem to consider farming as key land use function, since farming can establish strong relationships between residents concerned about quality food, open space and recreation. Of course, other major open space functions such as forestry and nature conservation are not being ignored, but they tend to be less present, or are considered as parts of (urban) parks. Farming, like other open space functions, proves to be extremely important to safeguard and develop spatial and landscape qualities near the city. Spatial planning ideas, such as green fingers, will fail without strong support of local actors and networks. Also residents, whether we call them urban or rural, play a major role as bedrock for “rurality near the city”. The final conclusion is that activation of the collaboration between different disciplines will certainly contribute to both scientific and political interest in this topic that is gaining strong strategic importance because of expanding urbanisation worldwide.

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