

Urban-Rural Relationships: North-South Perspectives

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Colloquium organized by Labex DynamiTe

Urban/rural relationships are one of the cornerstones of the linkages of societies to their geographic space. In the social sciences, the rural/urban dichotomy has given rise to a number of specialized fields, and their relations have for long constituted one of the major research themes which reveal the dynamics of regional solidarity and the organization of space at the meso-scale of regions and States.

In recent decades, however, new dynamics have fundamentally altered these interactions: the reinforcement of residential mobility linked to employment, the diversification of types of activity, the emergence of environmental concerns, and new demands being made with respect to rural space, particularly the search for 'nature'. The blurring of boundaries between urban and rural introduced by peri-urbanization, new forms of urbanization from the bottom up, as well as the contraction of space-time and the merging of scales resulting from the globalization of exchanges has often relegated our reflection on exchanges and regional solidarity between cities and countryside into the background, with a significant shift both in terms used and topics addressed. It is now more often a question of a rural-urban gradient (or continuum), and analyses have become increasingly focused on phenomena such as peri-urbanization, rurbanization, the relationships between society and nature, the sustainable city, rural diversification, multi-functionality, the greening of the countryside, and multiple senses of belonging and identity, to name but a few. In addition, in taking account the territorial resources needed to respond to the new reality of globalization, can we not also observe an increase in micro-scale or local studies at the same time as there has been a decline in studies on meso-scale territorial interactions?

Despite these transformations, the question of the functional and political relationships between cities and countryside has resurfaced, for example, when it is necessary to describe the evolution of agricultural production systems as a function of the demands of (and distance to) metropolitan markets, or to analyze the daily mobility patterns, local practices or residential trajectories. Research has highlighted the renewed pertinence of an approach that focuses on the complementarities and exchanges between cities and countryside. We therefore propose a critical reflection on the categories and models, and to pose again the question of the principal thrusts of their relationships in the context of accelerated processes of metropolitanization, globalization (economic and social) and urbanization in Southern territories and urban sprawl in Northern territories. Through the rise of alternative forms to the former model that emphasized the dichotomy between urban and rural worlds, the reconfiguration of city-countryside relationships highlights the emergence of new relationships with territories linked to the accelerating processes of globalization.

Papers are expected to confront city and countryside in order to contribute to comparative approaches involving the situations encountered in Northern versus Southern territories. In the analysis of systems – or régimes – of relationships between city and countryside, four key themes will be focused on to identify the types of relationships between these spaces, at different scales.

1. Activity Systems and the Mobility of People and Groups between City and Countryside

In this time of globalization and faced with crises that affect both cities as well as rural worlds, activity systems are based on the complementarities between these two types of spaces in the context of strategies developed and put in place by individual or collective actors: migration from rural to city and abroad in search of new resources or additional income, and multiple exchanges between urban and rural citizens (financial transfers, the role of the residential economy, food products, knowledge, know-how, information, different consumer models, among others). Different types of mobility whether they rely on social networks based on family ties, proximity of origin or any other type of relationship, contribute to mobilizing resources to benefit individuals or groups living in the city as well as in the countryside. What roles do these exchanges and complementarities play in terms of access to different resources (economic social, symbolic) and in the strategies of social reproduction of certain population groups? The consequences of mobility on the areas of origin are not limited to the transfer of individuals. To what extent do the different types of mobility contribute to changing social hierarchies and social behavior in the areas of origin? Do they not modify the rules for access to resources in rural areas (particularly land)? In some cases, the departure of productive functions can also be observed from cities to the benefit of service activities, part of industrial productive employment which depend upon a low-skilled workforce located in rural areas where land is less expensive. How does productive restructuring rebuild the links between cities and countryside?

Do these new types of linkages result in exchanges over longer distances, thereby bypassing more proximate relationships? What role can be attributed to the different types of agglomerations in the polarization of flows, from small to larger cities, from the local neighborhood to the international metropolis? On the one hand, do international migrations that become more important not require a rethinking of the relationships between city and countryside that bypass nearby cities? On the other hand, have metropolitan concentrations reached such a size that most exchanges are now focused internally, with increased turbulence in large urban areas, given their size and diversification? How does the nature of cities and urban systems (metropolitan, megalopolitan, macrocephalic or not, or dominated by secondary cities) affect relationships with rural hinterlands? Does the countryside still represent a reservoir (depopulated, aging, with stabilized agricultural or tourism functions ...)? A destination? In migration trajectories, do the comings and goings between cities and countryside tend to increase? In addition, are the migratory routes principally represented by migration from the countryside to the cities? Is there a “return” to the countryside and do such returns all have the same meaning? In crisis situations, don’t rural areas often function as

refuge areas? Can we find common ground between what happens in the countries in the North and those in the South?

2. Urban Peripheries: Comparative Approaches

The very nature of the spaces on the outskirts of metropolis and their development processes have been the subject of many debates: among the issues debated have been the urban frontier, metamorphism, the emerging city, but also new countrysides; there has been debate about whether there is or not a social and spatial continuum, or a gradient depending on the distance to a central urban pole. Without repeating the achievements of these controversies, we will endeavor to re-examine the modes of contact between rural and urban, their spatial configurations and their dynamics.

2.1 Urban periphery and/or peri-urban fringe: what are the spatial configurations of the contact between city and countryside?

The terms of urban peripheries and peri-urban areas cover very different realities depending on the country, the city, and within the same region, the different zones and sectors. The morphologies of urban peripheries cannot be reduced to a single model, as heterogeneity is clearly obvious even around the same city, suggestive of the often used notion of a mosaic. If the social diversity of these spaces has been widely documented, what about densities, infrastructure levels, different territorial arrangements, the types of contacts between the countryside and the city and the morphology of the urban fronts?

We will focus on territorial arrangements in this zone of contact. What are the commonalities between the territories in the North and the South? Has the rapid development of the middle classes in emerging metropolii led to a convergence of forms and processes at work in metropolitan fringes? Is the concept of 'periurban' a Franco-French concept, due in part to the scale of the communal framework? What are the differences with other forms observed elsewhere, given the diversity of heritage and territorial linkages, governance systems, and priorities in terms of regional planning?

In the South in particular, bottom-up urbanization, rural densification and multi-spatial resources sometimes produce new territorial realities beyond the categories of rural and urban. How can we interpret these ways of living in these spaces? Are they tropical versions of peri-urbanization and rurbanization dynamics already experienced in the countries of the North or do they represent the development of original territorial interactions?

2.2 What is the future for urban peripheries?

These contact zones, often called sub-urban or pre-urban forms, are they doomed to be integrated or digested by the city? Are they simply a transitional form doomed to disappear by the demands of the compact city, or are they an innovative form, a model of the suburb in the era of the automobile, but more spread out and experiencing processes of morphological and socio-demographic intensification and diversification?

Landscape amenities, the attractiveness of intermediate densities and accessibility contribute to a strong enhancement of rural areas in contact with the city, leading to a change in ownership patterns, bringing them closer to the regulations associated with urban land and with the operation of metropolitan land markets. What comparable perspectives are associated

with this contact zone in different metropolitan contexts? A reinvented countryside? A new space with its own characteristics? A zone in waiting where different dynamics compete with each other?

The communications, using examples taken from different contexts, should allow for the comparison of forms and processes and lead to a reflection on the functions of urban peripheries in different social and spatial contexts.

3. Agriculture and Proximity, Feeding the Metropolii: Convergent Choices in the Territories of the North and South?

The food supply functions of urban areas have been observed for many years and they extend way beyond the peri-urban zones that produce basic food-stuffs or specialty crops, and new regional specializations or even new international specializations in rural areas are emerging in certain types of urban food supplies. At the same time, the dynamics of the re-territorialization and the diversification of farm activities can be observed that integrate urban demands, and give rise to a better appreciation of proximity and the short circuits between consumer and producer which have been considered more and more as guarantors of quality. How do these emerging forms of agriculture and social demands regarding product quality and environmental protection participate in and contribute to the reconstruction of city-countryside relationships?

The time-lag between urbanization and the establishment of efficient transport systems led initially to a significant reduction of agricultural zones (indeed, almost to their extinction, except for a few very specialized productions) that had partly ensured the feeding of metropolii in Northern countries, while in Southern countries various forms of intensification and specialization appeared at the outskirts of the larger cities – frequently ports – to provide food products for the rapidly growing urban populations as well as for export. Today, a better appreciation of food production proximity can be observed by urban consumers in the North, with the recent and oftentimes dramatic rise of the local food movement. Is it the same in the metropolii of the South, with the development of an educated and demanding middle class, more affluent classes which can afford higher costs?

What are the similarities between the metropolii of the North and those in the South? What differences exist in the agricultural production systems at the edges of cities – in the type of mobilization of the workforce or in the evolution of land tenure relationships? How can we understand the interplay of the complementarities and competition for land and water use at the edges of the city? Beyond the diversity of situations, contributions to this colloquium will endeavor to highlight the processes contributing to the maintenance or decline of agricultural uses and the transformations of open spaces.

4. Public Policy and Changing Rural-Urban Relationships

After an era dominated by sectoral policies or focused on urban or agricultural specificities, more inclusive approaches are back on the scene, which can be analyzed, depending on the

context, using various terminologies (local development, territorial development, regional development, among others). The aim here is to examine the current role of city-countryside relations in the debates on the models of territorialized public intervention, and to probe how the tools for information and action on territorial dynamics take into account the contemporary realities of the interactions between rural and urban.

This may relate to land use planning practices in the strict sense as well as discussions on politico-administrative boundaries and different levels of decentralization, as well as approaches to providing support to territorialized productive sectors. Are there specific planning policies in relation to urban peripheries? At what geographic scales are they applicable? Who bear the responsibilities of such policies? How do residents and consumers, when challenging the government, bring about modifications to these policies and practices?

Through these questions, the objective is to go beyond the highly focused approaches in identifying the types of contact and relations between city (ies) and countryside (s) and to question the existence of macro-regional specificities: is the distinction between North and South still relevant? In different urban contexts, what processes are causing differentiation between metropolii and second-level cities? Do the relationships maintained with countrysides allow us to distinguish different categories of cities? Do they highlight different time scales, in the face of the globalization process?

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Practical Information

Summaries in French or English must be sent before November 17, 2014 to:
UMR8586.colloque.villes-campagnes@cnrs.fr. Summaries should not exceed 2 pages in length and should present the problematic and context, the method used and the territory as well as the principal results.

The summaries will be evaluated by the Scientific Committee and the authors of the **papers** will be notified of the decision in early January 2015.

The texts of accepted papers must be received by April 10, 2015.

The **colloquium** will be held in Paris on **June 9, 10 and 11, 2015.**