THE URBANISED RURAL

/BOSSE BERGMAN AND CATHARINA DYRSSEN
Royal Institute of Technology and Chalmers University of Technology

bosse.bergman@abe.kth.se; dyrssen@chalmers.se

Urbanisation is still understood largely as a one-directed process of people and industry moving to larger cities, causing de-popularisation of rural areas. City growth is an obvious tendency and has rendered "the urban" a normative political role in planning and governance. Uneven geographic development escalates in Sweden like in several other countries and increase needs to improve adequate local-regional planning practice for development and transformation. Cities and the urban have become idealised as models for living, production and consumption and tend to detach rural and sparsely populated areas as something essentially different.

However, this is a severe simplification. Many contemporary changes of rural areas may originate in cities, and could be regarded as extended colonisations of the rural by cities, but mainly marks a shift since early industrialism concerning regionalisation. From start it was a process that dissolved city-countryside dichotomies, and both current and earlier planning practice in Sweden have involved "urban" and "rural" areas of extensive variation and diverse forms. Simplified understandings of the term urbanisation still neglect regional interdependencies, exchanges and connections but with ecology and global economy it is obvious that the processes of urbanisation have two-way directions, connecting and affecting both cities and rural landscapes. Hence, regarding regions as integrated planning contexts in a wide range of environments, we ask: What does a more complex understanding of urbanisation mean for planning and its related discourse?

URBAN GROWTH PERSPECTIVES

Standard growth perspectives are still projected as spatial norms onto more sparsely populated areas, relentlessly stigmatising some regional parts as loosers in municipal competition, running the risk of being conserved mainly as natural resources or leisure locations serving city life, or as unspecific, "passive" surroundings. City growth through market oriented competition has been the issue of critical research and partial revision, but centralised outsets continue to drive a metropolitan-hinterland dichotomy as the basis for regional planning, and reproduce traditional models for "city", "town", "density", etc. The dense, mixed city is (scientifically unproven) often claimed to support sustainable development within the paradigm of economic growth, and projected onto a diverse range of spatial conditions. This maintains inherent power hierarchies and even conserves the verbal status between centre and periphery, town and rural surroundings etc. Compartmentalisation – what we call "containerism" – adds to local-regional planning rivalry where collaborative use of resources, competences and services across territorial borders could be both environmentally and economically more beneficial. Behind these problematic planning conditions lingers a conventional understanding of "urbanisation" as a one-directed process, as

if nothing has happened with the rural since depopulation began or as if Henri Lefebvre never wrote *La revolution urbain* (1970).

Increasing spatial complexities and development diversity necessarily question what a broadened understanding of urbanisation means for planning. We will follow some of the current critique, mainly as formulated by political scientist/urban theorist Neil Brenner and sociologist Christian Schmid (2013a, b), and based on our own studies of urban-rural areas and Swedish planning practice we will discuss how urbanisation as an inclusive process can support contemporary planning, set in relation to "regionalisation". Connecting to some of Brenner's and Schmidt's suggestions for additional investigation we hope to open a discussion on possible shifts in understandings, planning approaches, discourse and methods.

CRITIQUE OF THE URBANISATION CONCEPT

Already in the 1990s, Thomas Sieverts provoked traditional "compact city" ideals in his studies on *Zwischenstadt* and the diversity of urban-rural landscapes that constitute large parts of environments today (Sieverts 1997). Sieverts convincingly argued that this international phenomenon closely connects to the concepts of landscapes and settlements, related to resource use and understandings of contemporary everyday life forms. The English title *Cities without Cities* (2003) stressed that traditional "urb" formations are challenged by new perspectives on "urban-ness", with references to centrality, density, periphery etc., as well as on ecological socio-economical, cultural, political, design and planning aspects from these new spatial understandings.

Several followers with similar argumentation should also be mentioned, for example Sievert's colleagues and publications in the *Zwischenstadt* series, studies at ETH Studio Basel by Roger Diener et al (2006) on wide-ranging understandings of Swiss urban landscapes, GUST (Ghent Urban Studies Team, 1999), works by Edward Soja (1996, 2003), certainly the landscape urbanism movement triggered by James Corner and Charles Waldheim in the 1990s, and urban architects Dana Cuff, Roger Sherman and the Los Angeles cityLAB, (Cuff and Sherman 2011). Within Scandinavia we may refer to the research group in Aarhus around Urban Mutation (2004), researchers at Landscape Architecture in Copenhagen (Braae 2015, Tietjen 2011) or Bosse Bergman's extensive studies on Swedish roadscapes, e.g. in E4-staden (2008). The literature today is massive.

Brenner and Schmid (2013a, b) launch a broad understanding of urbanisation as complex sociospatial processes conditioned by global economy. They criticise views on urbanisation as one-way demographic movements and argue, similar to for instance Sieverts, that urbanisation as a theoretical concept may encompass a wide range of environments, where "the urban" and "the rural" are deeply entangled in multifaceted ways. In their article *'Urban Age' in Question* (2013b), Brenner and Schmid argue that ideas of one-way movements and a majority of world population today living in cities is a partly misinterpreted trope conserved by dominating institutions like the United Nations, London School of Economics, Deutsche Bank etc. Such factoids, based on demographic statistics, were debated for relevance already in the 1950s, reaching back to critical studies from 1937, but still remain as "truths" defining urbanisation and "urbanised areas" in authorised statistics, academic research, book production and outsets in planning, especially from mid 2000s (ibid: 5-12). The authors show how 'obviously arbitrary' definitions of urban conditions and re-organisations have been maintained as 'relentless dynamics of socio-spatial restructuring [… that] have continuously reworked the boundaries, scale and morphology' (p. 5). Instead, urbanisation should consider 'thickening webs of connectivity', 'unstable constellations of metropolitan social organization' and 'emergent worldwide horizons' (p. 8). They also claim that 'centers and peripheries are immanent within the accumulation of capital itself' (2013b: 13, quoting Merrifield 2011), and that the idea of "Urban Age" is a chaotic conception:

> '*The basic problem is de facto sociospatial fluidity and relentless dynamism of the urban phenomenon under modern capitalism: its endemic tendency to explode inherited morphologies*

of urbanism at all spatial scales; to create new, rescaled formations of urbanized territorial organization [---] to promote the 'urbanization of the world' by intensifying sociospatial independencies across places, territories and scales.' (p. 13).

The particular critique of the "Urban Age thesis" is that it (a) divides the indivisible in regions and landscapes (p. 17); (b) 'lumps together unrelated and the inessential' by 'pervasive black-boxing of the rural' and radically 'overspecified urban' (p. 18); and (c) that it neglects that the "urban condition" 'encompasses a vast spectrum of settlement conditions, ranging from small- and medium-sized towns to regional centres, metropolitan cores' (p. 18).

REGIONAL URBAN-RURAL INTERPLAY

If urbanisation is general and involves all socio-spatial processes, affecting all areas and regions, can we then do away with specific categories of urban and rural conditions?

The Swedish word *landsbygd*, analogue to English "countryside", literary means "what is not city" or "does not have city-like built structures" but also more neutrally denotes "part of the country" or "built areas" contrasting to "unbuilt areas" (SAOB 1939). Rural areas consist of a number of mixed landscapes: agricultural production, forestry, industries, sites for retail and service, meeting points and dwellings. Other parts are characterised by nature, tourist routes with associated scenery and narratives, expansions of towns and cities, and infrastructures of transecting roads, railways, transport nodes etc. Mobility related to work, leisure, tourism, goods etc. generates different patterns and demands. Production and industry in rural areas often display mixed features with 'urban' traits: agriculture also developing small-scale industry, horse-breeding, transportation contracting or vending etc. where incomes from agriculture can combine with jobs related to the service sector, industry or business.

Undoubtedly, depopulation of rural areas and increased city growth have characterised development in Sweden since the beginning of industrialism in the early 19th Century. National planning (Sw. *Riksplaneringen*) around 1970 responded to industrial decrease after World War II and aimed to balance regions with support to sparsely populated areas. In the last fifty years city sprawl has accelerated – mainly because of larger dwellings and increased mobility (digital as well as physical transportations of people, money and goods), with large parts of rural surroundings embedded in city regions, also expanded by new retail establishments at "hot" route connections, city outskirts and small towns. The general decline of industry and rising costs to maintain welfare pushed the public sector (state-municipalities) towards cooperation with market actors, culminating when more neoliberal orientated services, together with the ICT breakthrough in the 1980s launched the idea of "K-society" – communication, knowledge and creativity – in one package. Enlarged municipalities were given stronger roles in political governance, for instance with land use monopoly and school system's authority. This opened for more business oriented management of the welfare sector and competitive municipal practices. Regional planning today is largely limited to well-defined sectors like traffic, infrastructure, environmental issues, education etc. Many regionalisation possibilities for exchange and synergy effects between sectors are being neglected, although this could support long-term sustainability.

Today almost all persons in Sweden, regardless of residence, are connected to "urban lifestyles": We shop in city centres and malls, commute to work, communicate and consume through the internet. Work market and education are closely tied together; culture and leisure develop a range of entrepreneurial activities, and tourism embraces both distant and local visitors with shopping, events, culinary experiences and accommodation as important components. The traditional city ("urb"), with its concentrations of enterprises and banks, capital and various competences, is important to trigger economy, but criteria shift concerning qualities of everyday life. Migration into rural areas varies; people may value countryside life-style and accept longer commuting (though often desiring reach to larger cities); others see possibilities of dwelling and income in smaller

places. Land use and small industries in rural areas are often stabilised by being inherited into the next generation. Today, agriculture in southern Sweden, lacking work force, express needs for improved job status and new staff.

Regions differ in size, hierarchies, economic base, location in the nation and connections to other regions or national borders. As agents in (sociocultural) urban dynamics, interconnected at many levels and as variations of "urban landscapes", regions may also be recognised as 'fragile urban landscapes', as discussed by Björling (2016). Metropolitan regions differ from those dominated by middle-sized cities or sparsely populated areas, but it is also a question of density structures: A regional area like Skaraborg in West Sweden shows a mesh of small towns and criss-crossing traffic routes: major transport corridors, railways, main roads, water routes and a web of smaller roads, often of old historic origin. If considered as a coherent domain of approximately 130x130 km, Skaraborg forms a "network city" with around 250.000 inhabitants, equal to the third largest city in Sweden (Malmö), but with its two largest "centres" of only about 30.000 people.

"Urban networks" can no longer be understood as neutral links between nodes, but constitute "connecting landscapes" articulated by shifting contents and formation. And landscapes along transport infrastructure are not merely "transport corridors" but scapes with certain character, preconditions, activities, potentials and transformative processes. Flexible traffical systems rapidly develop along with expanded diversity of transport – including adaptable combinations of vehicles, deliberative solutions, shared economic responsibilities and digital services (for instance *Uber* transportation) – often connect with other sectors or welfare services.

An economy – and ecology – as tourism is an example of today's complex relational regionalism generating new administrative and business sectors, interdependencies, collaborations, networks, locations etc. with roots and motifs belonging both to "urban" and "rural". Tourism as event and service industry may relate to historical sites (churches, castles, canals etc.), nature, food, accommodation, shopping, sports, narratives, crafts, restauration etc. Its roles for business and education increases with the thematic diversity (for instance event guiding, food crafts or local history courses), also including services such as tool repair, everyday food markets, material manufacturing and communication services, local farming products or industrial design. But it also profits from rural clichés, stereotyped for instance in *Nordic Noir* criminal movie settings in dramatic wild nature (with attached guided tours).

One example of the risk to not rethink the town centre norm and its relational aspects is Haparanda, a town located at the Finnish border in the very north of Sweden, which welcomed IKEA as an additional value. Haparanda redeveloped the town centre according to conventional norms as a dense mix of housing and commercial functions while the new mega-company was located in the outskirts by the throughway. The drastic consequence was that most customers went to the new commercial location, draining the town centre. With a more relational urban approach, free from the "city design norm", a more flexible and sustainable model could probably have been developed. Another example is Charlottenberg in Western Sweden at the border to Norway. The municipality accepted a Norwegian multi-million investment to build a large shopping mall at the main highway connection, close to the old centre and its main street with small shops, housing and services. The new border retail was successful, and has partly generated more housing and enterprises, but to large extent the old main street is drained and closing down. Here planning could have acted more proactively – again thinking beyond the city norm – to recognise the new centre's possibilities and transforming the agency of the old area.

POWER PERSPECTIVES
Urbanism refers both to a knowledge field related to architecture and planning, and socio-cultural aspects involving certain "urban" identity codes, still containing implicit power hierarchies between "urban" and "rural". On the one hand we have the geo-political linkage of urban to "centre"

and rural to "margins", bestowing centres the activating role while "margins" are understood as more passive in competitive global economy. Centres regarded as "hubs" project metaphors of driving wheels, central axes or "activating engines" in complex industrial machineries, or as intense meeting places for "creative class" gatherings, as launched by Richard Florida (Fredriksson 2014). Since the 18th Century urbanity also signifies "high society" connected to diplomacy and international contacts, which spills over to "civilization" and modernity. But in more recent discourses on the urban, suburbs with "marginal" locations are often seen as "young" modes of thinking-acting, spaces of "less control" with connotations to incitements for conflict, creativity and renewal.

Socio-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (2000) argues that urban redevelopment processes contain a "double apartheid effect" for grassroot groups, which involves difficult power interplays. Firstly, he says, there are traps by the "community of assessment" where standardised validation proceedings and quality criteria, measurement systems and ratings legitimise certain research values, investment alternatives etc. Secondly, communities or organisations with weak resources must be able to connect the double systems of glocal: They must gain local trust, often enacted on site, in real physical contexts and pragmatic time perspectives, with expected concrete results. But they must also be able to handle the global perspectives and its communication forms in terms of technology, values and discourse. This, Appadurai argues, raises urgent needs for much stronger ethical stands and critical discussions within academy as well as professional practice, and calls also for more imagination, virtuosity, pedagogic skills and activism.

WHAT TO DO
Concluding their *Urban Age* examination, Brenner and Schmid suggest needs for additional knowledge, here briefed in selection, indicating knowledge gaps for further research and practice approaches: (1) The urban and urbanisation are theoretical categories – the need for conceptual abstractions. (2) The urban is not a universal form but a historical process – needing studies on continual sociospatial transformation, changing settlement types and morphologies for entire territories, not only limited "points" or "zones". (3) The sociospatial dimensions of urbanisation are polymorphic, variable and dynamic – needing new cartographies and understandings that move away from 'settlement-based understandings of the urban condition'. (4) Urbanisation involves both concentration and extension – needing studies on 'densely tangled circuits of labor, commodities, cultural forms, energy, raw materials and nutrients' and 'webs of relations to other places'. (5) Urbanisation has become 'a planetary phenomenon [---] there is no longer any outside to the urban world' – hence the need to rethink 'urban/rural binarism' and question it as 'increasingly obfuscatory basis for deciphering the morphologies, contours and dynamics of sociospatial restructuring under early twenty-first century capitalism.' (6) Urbanisation constantly produces new differentiations – the need to re-examine patterns of differentiation and varieties in urbanisation processes. (7) A new vocabulary of urbanisation emerges – needing 'new analytical approaches, methods and concepts, including experimental and speculative ones, as well as visualizations of evolving sociospatial and sociometabolic conditions […] a new lexicon of urbanization processes and forms of territorial differentiation' (2013: 18-22).

The aspects of urban norms – both as design conventions and as general theoretical-conceptual understandings – need to be discussed much more, beyond the surface and disciplinary boundaries but with knowledge depth in planning, governance, landscape and architectural perspectives. At the centre of interest stand the regions, understood as broad, relational potentials and diverse landscapes of urban and rural character, structures, networks and processes. These diverse regions need more qualified descriptions, thematic and relational mappings and systemic analyses that recognise changing administrative sectors, interdependencies and collaborations, networks, links, environments and agencies of interest – including the power struggles, capacities and potentials that go with it.

So, architecture and planning friends, there is a lot of work to do to bring about new understandings and planning practices of regionalisation and develop new ways to deal with the local-

regional. For instance: Brenner's and Schmid's broad criticism needs to be reflected by Appadurai's radical renewal of anthropological perspectives and by recent studies in the Sievert's tradition. Media stereotypes must be re-examined, partly by revisiting planning history. Key concepts must be developed for more relevant discursive and practice agency. And planning practice must use complex architectural-designerly and cross-disciplinary thinking to explore wider logics and effects for systemic, spatial rethinking of regions.

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