

***Smart, sustainable and inclusive economic growth through territorial linkages:
the example of 'food'***

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Message 1: Peri-urban territories are key to understanding urban/rural relations – so let's capitalise on this experience

Peri-urban is the territorial reality for an increasing area of the EU. The PURPLE network, of which Randstad is a founding member, has been working since 2004 for acknowledgement of this reality in EU policy. What does peri-urban consist of?

Most importantly, it consists of a mix of rural and urban characteristics which co-exist and interact in the same territory. Where better therefore to explore rural-urban relations? This mix offers a wide spectrum of opportunities and urban/rural lifestyle choices for the many inhabitants. These areas have large populations living in varied settlement patterns of towns, villages and suburbs and they attract more and more city dwellers seeking a better quality of life, more affordable housing and space to breathe.

So in addition to economic diversity and intellectual capital, peri-urban areas offer locations for infrastructure and communication – transport links, energy and other essential resources and services including fresh water for urban and peri-urban inhabitants. They offer valued landscapes and open space for recreation and health, enjoyment of countryside, leisure and sport... and of course a range of well-established land-based services encompassing agriculture, horticulture and forestry.

For many regions this kind of territorial development is not particularly new and they have a wealth of experience in managing urban/rural relations through highly developed governance structures and partnership working.

Example of food: Towards a more sustainable food chain

Let's focus on food in peri-urban regions. Food has always been produced close to cities and the large areas we would now call peri-urban were – and are still – of vital importance for food production – from small scale to large agri-businesses.

The availability of good food is a territorial strategic asset. Within peri urban regions challenges are emerging. Not only availability in *quantity*, peri-urban regions are commonly the interface where (inter)national trade routes come together forming Europe's "food hubs", but in terms of *quality and affordability*. To keep high quality food affordable, the impact of the food chain on the environment and its dependence on imported natural resources of the food chain must be lowered. This is part of the EU strategy for sustainable growth and must be seen in perspective of a transition towards a circular economy. This transition requires room for innovation, experimentation and smart solutions involving multi-sectoral approaches. There is not one solution. Numerous initiatives and innovation can contribute, to bringing about viable peri-urban agriculture which links urban and rural. Here are two examples from different perspectives.



Example (1) From Randstad Region: an example with strong sustainable credentials, where a large public/private sector coalition works together to sustain the production of beer in the immediate surroundings of the production facility. Stakeholders, including the citizens and farmers living in the region shared ideas on how the most sustainable beer could be brewed. This resulted in a concept of an almost circular beer brewing process on a regional scale, requiring involvement of farmers, citizens and the public sector. Local crops, grown with special attention to biodiversity are used. Energy needed for the brewing is partly generated from biomass from surrounding nature/recreational areas (partly maintained on voluntary bases) and from farms. Manure is processed to provide minerals. Beer brewing residue and algae are used to feed animals (cows). And the cows in turn produce milk from this “regional diet” which in turn is processed by the farmers into butter and cheese sold in the region. Is this still a dream? No, it is being developed as we speak, although it is not straightforward, because some of the procedures are not standard, but all stakeholders are determined to make it happen. As a region our role is to provide room for spatial development, target rural development funding to get a collective of farmers to provide the crops meeting the biodiversity standards and provide access to research and development facilities. And of course the beer is going to be being sold and marketed as a regional product.

Example (2) From Nord-Pas de Calais: Global process towards food governance to go beyond sectoral policies, consisting notably of:

- association of all relevant food system stakeholders through a dynamic participatory process
- coordination by a transversal working team within the Regional Council
- signature of “Peri-Urban Agriculture and Food Conventions” with three proactive urban agglomerations (Lille, Douai and Béthune) aiming at designing and conducting 3 year territorial action programmes

Message 2: Peri-urban territorial development is stimulated by diversity within the region

A diverse regional economic base is a key to sustainable competitiveness. The urban and rural economies meet in the peri-urban area creating a dynamic mix with real potential for innovation and growth.

The development of policies to achieve a prosperous model of symbiosis between urban and rural is very dependent on local and regional conditions, but is being pursued in a number of ways in peri-urban regions often using a pragmatic functional area approach.

Better policy integration is an important element and peri-urban areas need to implement regional orientated strategies, using a variety of tools, including spatial planning, to stimulate collaboration across the whole territory to enhance urban-rural relations and meet the challenges of rapid peri-urban development.

Please also see PURPLE’s Topic Paper of Food Security, where we explore this important issue from a peri-urban perspective.

