



purple

peri-urban regions platform Europe

# Topic Paper

## Peri-Urban Open Space

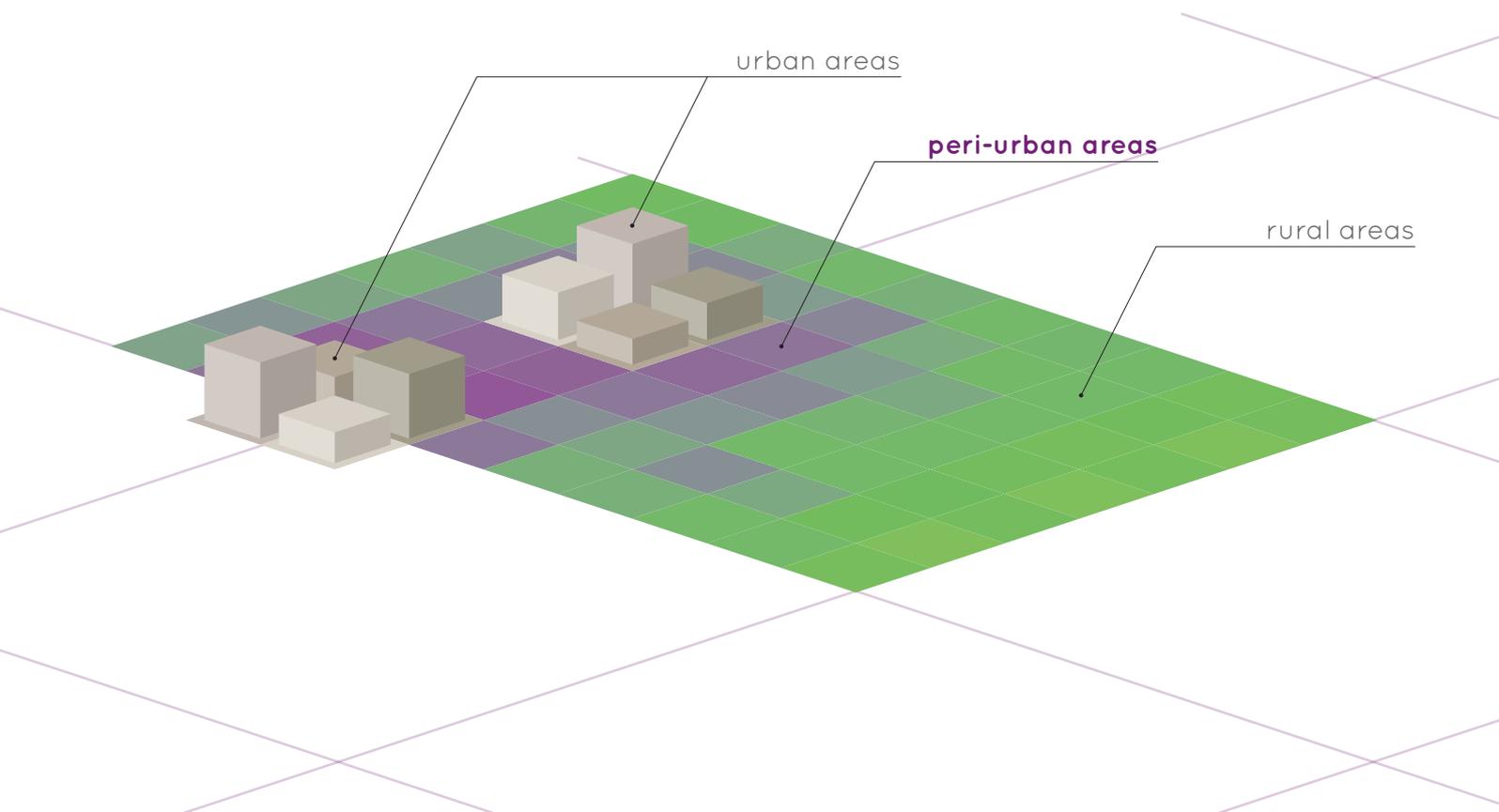
how multi-functional land use  
can bring multiple benefits



## Introduction

PURPLE's Topic Papers aim to raise and explore important issues for policy makers and politicians which are linked to the specificity of peri-urban areas.

Around and between cities, especially in densely populated regions, are important peri-urban areas which are often overlooked and misunderstood. Here there is a high diversity of land uses and important and productive agricultural land and open space. This is often unrecognised or undervalued in current policy development which is too often compartmentalised into urban and rural actions.



## 1. Peri-urban – both urban and rural

Peri-urban areas are where urban and rural features co-exist. Suburbs, towns and villages together with essential infrastructure (transport, waste, energy etc.) serve large populations. But between and alongside this development, there is another world of open space, forests and woodlands - and above all, important farming and food production. There are growing pressures on peri-urban space and resources (particularly water) which are complex and contradictory.

Peri-urban areas are often seen as attractive places to live and work that offer a high quality of life. The upside of this is a dynamism exemplified by economic success and business growth often clustered around innovation centres, airports and other well-connected transport interchanges.



But in some areas, people are moving from city centres to peri-urban areas because of the availability of more desirable housing and lifestyles, and this can create social imbalances. For many peri-urban areas there is a down side of success and growth in terms of rising land values, urban sprawl, increased traffic, unsustainable use of resources and potential negative impacts on the very environment and landscapes which make these territories attractive in the first place.

Alongside the aspirations for regional growth with consolidation or further development of economic assets, Europe's regions seek to continue to develop their transport systems, adapt public transport to modal shift, and find new locations for industry and services, including waste (disposal) infrastructure. In addition to these hard developments, European metropolitan regions have high ambitions regarding the protection of the natural environment and the development of ecological networks such as room for flooding. So Europe's cities and urban areas put diverse and substantial pressures on peri-urban open space and in particular on the agricultural land within peri-urban areas which is vulnerable and, in some areas, under threat.

PURPLE is exploring the challenges and opportunities of managing Europe's multifunctional peri-urban territories. How can we maximise the potential of the 'urban' and 'rural' assets of peri-urban areas and ensure a sustainable coexistence?

## 2. What is at stake?

- Loss of viable agriculture and horticultural production

In peri-urban areas agricultural land has an important role in preserving open space against urbanisation. In these areas a substantial amount of biodiversity is linked to the historical agricultural land use. Agriculture has to play a full part in improving and managing biodiversity in peri-urban regions and ensuring connectivity between natural areas and preservation of biodiversity in agricultural land use. A link should be made with the CAP in order to give agriculture in peri-urban regions the role to manage and preserve biodiversity and ensure such connectivity between nature areas.



- Loss of open space

In all member states of the EU, there are laws and regulations for the management of land, urban and rural development, regional planning, the protection of landscapes and natural resources and, to a lesser extent for the protection of soil. They form the framework for urbanisation, utilisation and protection of land. They are framed by European regulations such as Natura 2000, the Water Framework directive, habitats, etc. However everyday open space, and in particular excellent arable and fertile agricultural land, is being converted to housing, commercial buildings, industrial buildings, communication routes (roads, railroads, airports, inland waterways, etc.) or infrastructure for leisure activities. In Belgium for example this loss of open space amounts to 12 hectares a day, in France the loss is estimated to be 200 hectares a day. In the old EU member states average loss is estimated to be around 0.12% of the surface area (data from Belgium, France, Germany, Luxemburg and the Netherlands), while in the new member states it is estimated to be only 0,2 % (data from Poland and Lithuania).

■ Specific contributions / benefits of peri-urban open space

**Production - 5 F's**

Most EU peri-urban regions have good climatic and soil conditions for agricultural production of: **food**, **fibres**, **fuel**, **flowers** and **fun** (horses and other leisure related production). Beside this important and varied economic activity, agriculture and food production for urban markets in peri-urban regions also plays an important role in the maintenance of landscapes, socio-economic viability and highly valued ecological and other functions.

**Resilience for climate change**

Urban and peri-urban adaptation to climate change (will) need space for new infrastructure: such as water storage and retention infrastructure and the development of renewable energy sources (wind and bio-energy). In order to realise these functions special attention has to be paid to the limiting of soil sealing and degradation of open space.

**Socio-cultural values**

Open spaces are places for relaxation, recreation and sports (cycling, walking, jogging, horse riding,). For some people they serve as a meeting place or somewhere simply to enjoy some peace and quiet. There are important educational functions: understanding and getting close to nature for urban citizens. Furthermore the historic features of the landscape define an important part of the cultural-historical identity of a region.

**Bio-diversity**

An important part of peri-urban bio-diversity is linked to its open spaces and green corridors

Because of its multiple functions - of importance for urban as well peri-urban sustainable ecological and economical development - open space in peri-urban areas needs special attention when opportunities for land development are offered. Land development in the peri-urban context has to focus on territorial multifunctional approaches.

### **3. Multifunctional land use improves conservation and resilience of peri-urban open space**

Peri-urban open spaces demand an integrated approach, because of their specific characteristics, and pressure from different sectors. In the peri-urban context the traditional separation between city and countryside is replaced by an area with a mix of functions: agriculture, nature, housing, industry and recreation. This mix of functions implies that a lot of actors with different backgrounds and interests are involved in the territorial development of a peri-urban area. The more functions an open space accommodates, the higher the need for local and political support to conserve it. Peri-urban multifunctional open space plays a crucial role as a physical link between urban and more remote rural areas. If the quality of place in peri-urban areas is developed in a multifunctional way, it will optimize this role.

### Different instruments can be used to achieve multifunctionality of peri-urban open space:

- - Land development for multifunctional land use
  - Integrated rural development projects
  - Agricultural diversification linked to the marketing of local food products
  - Tourism initiatives
  - Development of open space networks, such as regional parks
  - Green belt policies
  - Integrated governance

#### 4. What can PURPLE offer?

The multifunctional and complex development of peri-urban regions should be seen as an advantage – providing vital resources which support Europe’s urban populations and enhancing the quality of life of city dwellers but also enhancing economic viability of the rural neighbouring regions. But we need to develop together smarter ways of using the space and managing growth – including more integrated policy making.

The public authorities in PURPLE have the expertise and capacity to help develop the necessary policy links between urban and rural, and our regions can act as a laboratory for the EU in terms of testing and developing the necessary approaches to a more sustainable and multifunctional development in complex territories.



#### 5. Examples from peri-urban regions

See the PURPLE website for more examples of good practice in land use from peri-urban regions.

[www.purple-eu.org](http://www.purple-eu.org)

#### **PURPLE 15 member Regions:**

Catalonia, Dublin, Flanders, Frankfurt Rhein-Main, Ile-de-France, Mazovia, MHAL (Maastricht/Heerlen, Hasselt, Aachen, and Liège), Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Randstad, Rhône-Alpes, South-East England, South Moravia, Stockholm, West Midlands and Wielkopolska