



purple

peri-urban regions platform Europe

# Topic Paper

Peri-Urban Public Governance

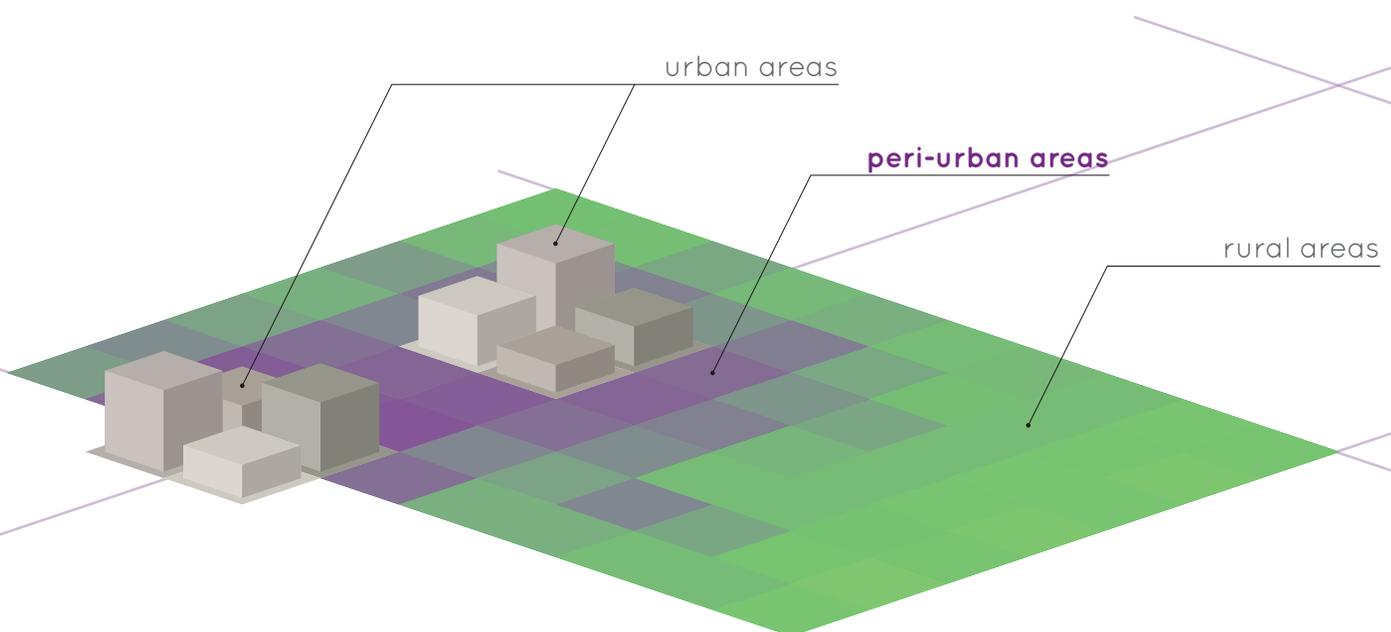


## Series Introduction

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 unrecognized or undervalued in current policy development which is too often compartmentalised into urban and rural actions.

PURPLE Topic Papers are intended to stimulate debate and draw attention to issues of importance to peri-urban regions. They are not intended as polemic and should not, for example, be regarded as "policy position papers". Each is written as stand-alone document forming part of a complementary series of papers; ideally they will serve as starting points for further investigation and detailed work.



## 1. Understanding Peri-Urban

- It is important that the reader is offered some sort of explanation of what PURPLE means by peri-urban. It is a concept that has proved extremely difficult to define but relatively straightforward to characterise. In the past PURPLE has tried to capture these characteristics in a number of different ways.

- For example:**

*“Peri-urban areas are themselves a mix of urban and rural. They contain high proportions of agriculture, productive woodland and forest close to Europe’s cities as well as high value landscapes and open space.*

*They are functionally diverse, being on the one hand important for farming, forestry and food production, often within or adjacent to protected landscapes, but they are also the location for major infrastructure, including transport, as well as for water storage, waste disposal facilities, processing and industry.*

*The crowded nature of these areas means there are conflicting pressures on land use (which also drives up the land values) and competition for the finite natural resources, together with a high risk of land fragmentation.”*

- Elsewhere we have said that: *“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 ....., 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.”*

- We accept that there is no universal consensus over the meaning of the term, and have already conceded that a set definition which works in all circumstances remains elusive. Nevertheless, this hopefully gives a clear sense of PURPLE’s sense of what peri-urban is like.

## 2. Peri-urban governance<sup>1</sup>

When this paper says that it is about governance in peri-urban areas what it means in reality is that is about public governance, and, more to the point still, it is about those aspects of public governance that are somehow particular to peri-urban areas. “Particular” is used loosely and means not only unique or specific, but also that which is more prevalent or more pronounced. It may in reality be about highlighting how something looks different in peri-urban contexts as opposed to others.

For exactly that reason, the focus here is on public governance as opposed to governance more broadly. There is little or nothing to say about the governance systems and structures of businesses, private organisations or societies that is any way particular to peri-urban territories as opposed to any other sort of place.

The paper attempts to identify, highlight, and explain key features, aspects, and dimensions of public governance in a particular type of territory – i.e. Peri-urban. It is hoped that doing so will be of interest and benefit to peri-urban areas beyond the existing PURPLE network and that those areas are able to both recognise themselves and identify with some of the points raised here. We hope too that it might be of benefit to those who perhaps feel that the territories for which they have some sort of responsibility are becoming peri-urban for the first time.



1. We should be clear about the range of governance bodies we are considering in this paper:
  - a. Broad public governance bodies, e.g. Regional assemblies or parliaments, regional governments or councils, regional development agencies.
  - b. Thematic “agencies” or similar (regional energy agencies, regional transport boards, regional climate-change partnerships,
  - c. Output specific groupings – Regional planning groups might exist specifically to produce a regional plan for example; there may be “task and finish groups” established to provide governance over a specific large-scale event or time-bound programme or process. We might include EU funding programme management committees in this section.
  - d. Private-public partnerships. These sit at the edge of our own “public governance” remit for this paper. In reality they may be set up as a vehicle for what we might place into category c) above. They nevertheless are a particular form of governance model and deserve our attention if we can determine a clear peri-urban dimension and relevance for them.

There are universal elements of good practice, principles, and issues pertaining to public governance. Not all have any particular peri-urban dimension and they too, therefore, are not the focus of this paper.

**These include for example:**

- The desirability of multi-actor engagement.
- The need to manage the complexities that such engagement entails.
- The general principle of equality and equity both in the sense of access to governance structures and in the decision-making processes therein.
- The need for transparency, openness and integrity.

All are 100% valid. We are in no way contesting their importance or correctness, but these issues have been addressed many times already in the general literature and for the purpose of this paper they should be taken as read. Only where we think there are particular peri-urban dimensions to any of the above we highlight do we draw attention to them.



### 3. Relevant policy and other contexts

#### Existing Paradigms

There are a number of different paradigms within which peri-urban governance has been addressed. We may find it useful to continue to use (or at least to be aware of), - these when contextualising the work of others:

- a. Broad analyses or studies of public governance. These may or may not have an overt or covert place-based approach. They may or may not use the term peri-urban and, if so, its usage may or may not be one that PURPLE recognises.

Often, such works will look for examples of success in complex situations and in some cases will highlight peri-urban areas in this context.

- b. Peri-urban governance has often been viewed through the prism of rural-urban or urban-rural partnership. A number of key studies and funded projects for example in recent years have taken “partnerships”, “linkages”, “synergies”, etc. as a starting point and within the work they have carried out have focused explicitly - to varying degrees - upon governance structures themselves.

There is much of use and relevance within such work. At the same time however, PURPLE would sound a fundamental note of caution. As argued elsewhere, peri-urban is a type of territory in its own right and in many places has been so for a very long time - it is not about some coming together of rural and urban where one simply meets the other at some point of demarcation on a map. It is about complex multi-functional areas where rural and urban co-exist, depend one upon the other, and have often done so for a long time.

- c. Another prism through which peri-urban governance has recently been viewed is that of functioning (economic) areas where the starting point for an approach to understanding the way in which things work is not to look at administrative boundaries or borders for example but to look at what is deemed to be a functioning area and then considering what occurs within these areas across a broad range of different topic areas of which governance is often one. benefit to biodiversity in the form of reduced transport emissions.

#### Policy contexts

Note that in reality “policy” is used here as a shorthand for “policy and legislation” - much of what is briefly described below is policy enacted through law or indeed constitution/ treaty.

#### Governance and decision-making processes at EU and national levels:

- Sovereignty
- Subsidiarity
- Dispute resolution
- Duties to consult
- Representation/representativeness

#### Territorial and place-based policy at EU and national levels:

- Urban (development) policy
- Rural (development) policy
- Cohesion policy

#### Sectoral level policy at EU and national levels:

- Regional and territorial policy
- Innovation policy
- Food policy
- Environmental policy

## 4. The nature of Governance systems and structures in peri-urban areas

### The territorial dimension

Peri-urban public governance is shaped and characterised by the very nature of the peri-urban territory to which it relates. By this, we mean, for example, that peri-urban life in all its forms is very much about balancing competing and potentially conflicting interests from different communities of interest or place.

Archetypically, we might think of these in terms of a) urban interests and b) rural interests. In reality, that is far too crude a dichotomy, but on occasion is useful shorthand. For example, where a governance body includes representatives of a particular place, and that place is urban, they will tend to have different priorities to others on the same body representing a place which is archetypically rural. Balance, compromise, mediated agreement, fairness and equality etc. are therefore from the very outset key considerations regarding peri-urban governance.

However, this is not essentially dissimilar to governance structures relating to other types of territory. So where is the peri-urban particularity? We suggest it lies in the degree of complexity: peri-urban governance will tend by its nature to be even more complex than that found elsewhere.



Of course, this directly leads to particular challenges - or scale of challenges, to particular potential pitfalls, obstacles, and barriers to be overcome. Here we would argue that peri-urban territories have an unusual - and uniquely valuable - set of experiences and expertise to share. At the same time, the peri-urban situation presents particular opportunities and PURPLE has long argued that peri-urban areas are particularly well-placed to demonstrate lessons learned in more positive ways, to serve as instances of good practice and as models which can be adapted and transferred for broader benefit. All grow directly out of the nature of the territory itself.

## Identifying characteristics

So what can we say is genuinely characteristic of peri-urban governance as opposed to governance as found in other types of territories? The following can reasonably be said to apply:

They ...

- tackle peri-urban “issues” from a particular stance, for example with regard to energy, water, waste, transport, business support and culture/heritage.
- have a complexity based on rural-urban balance.
- tend to show a high degree of state level involvement.
- will, on occasion, reflect inherent cross-boundary nature.
- often reflect what is happening in places in ongoing transition.
- often display an inequality of relationships between those directly involved.

## Power relationships

There is no question that any consideration of decision-making processes - their nature and efficiency - will need to include an understanding of power and influence. Who designs and drives the process? Are decisions made between equals, or are some interests more powerful than others? Are partnerships really partnerships of equals? Are the ways in which governance

systems and structures are shaped, and the ways they work, in effect skewed to give power unequally? Who actually owns these systems and structures? - We will assume ownership denotes power.

As at numerous other points in this paper, we will acknowledge straightaway that none of the above is necessarily unique to the peri-urban. But, there is one key dimension which is particular, and that is the perception and view expressed over and over again that in any coming together of urban and rural places/actors/interests the urban will very often be a senior partner with more rural interests playing a more junior partner role. PURPLE is therefore interested in:

- The power relationships between an urban centre and a less urban surrounding.
- Powers and rights conferred on urban areas and restricted to them.
- Powers and rights conferred on rural areas and restricted to them.
- The exceptional degree of state influence exercised in peri-urban areas.
- Funds (access to and management of) limited to urban areas.
- The ownership and control of governance systems and structures.
- Any explicit or implicit biases and imbalances in power which serve to hinder progress towards balanced governance in peri-urban places.

## 5. Opportunities and threats of peri-urban Governance

*There are both*

### Opportunities...

- To develop governance models that work in the most complex of circumstances.
- To analyse, understand and use these to overcome multiple known problems.
- To have such models replicated by others in similar circumstances or adapted to less complex ones.
- For peri-urban areas to deliver universal benefit by supporting the understanding and replication outlined in the two points above.
- To achieve thematic/issue level gains.
- To share knowledge and understanding of peri-urban governance as part of a broader process of increasing awareness and understanding of peri-urban issues.

*...and*

### Threats

- That the multiple challenges of arriving at successful governance models in peri-urban areas will prove insoluble.
- That peri-urban areas will have governance models imposed upon them which are contrary to local interests.
- That the inability to arrive at optimal governance models will detract from the unique contribution of peri-urban areas- to the detriment of themselves and everyone else.

If the opportunities detailed above can be grasped, effective governance systems and structures can be a key determinant of economic, environmental and social success. If threats are realised the actual and opportunity costs are extremely high and the effects highly damaging.

## 6. Developing an agenda for peri-urban governance

### What we already know

Governance systems and structures in peri-urban areas are manifest in the four different types of public governance bodies listed on page 4, they are often:

- **Long-established** and have evolved over time. Many are the results of reorganisations or the merging of functions of previous governance bodies over time.
- **Highly complex** with lengthy and complicated terms of reference, with a large number of differentiated members.
- **Multi actor/multi-sector** representing a broad range of sector/thematic/place-based interests within a single structure and set of processes
- **Multi-level**, that is they include representation from different levels ranging from the very local, the municipal, the district, regional and super-region levels. Depending on circumstances they will also very often have national-level input

We highlight these four dimensions because, although not unique to peri-urban areas, the features are exceptionally pronounced in such areas and can serve as a useful starting point for a peri-urban specific plan for action.

### Implications

- There is a push-back to be made on any notion of governance systems and structures which include both urban and rural interests being “new”.
- There is a valuable and considerable track-record in managing the types of issues all too often labelled as “new” or “emerging” when thinking about how relationships between “rural” and “urban” places, actors, and interests, are managed.
- Existing expertise and experience should be recognised and captured.
- There is a clear need to recognise and understand the territorial dimension of governance.
- There is a clear need to avoid unnecessary duplication of analysis, research and the drawing out of policy conclusions and implications.

*We therefore need*

### An agenda

Base on...

- Rooted in a place-based approach.
- Based on an understanding of functioning areas.
- Based on the right balance of interests.
- Based on equity between local and less local interests.
- Based on fair shares of resource and power.

## 7. Questions for policy-makers

- What can policy-makers and regulators do to make sure that the key contribution of existing peri-urban governance systems and structures is recognised and understood?
- How can improvements to existing peri-urban governance systems and structures be incentivised?
- What do they see as the particular challenges for peri-urban areas in terms of governance – and what role can policy-making play in supporting peri-urban actors to overcome such challenges?
- What specifically do they hope and aim to gain by improving peri-urban governance systems and structures?
- If the unequal power relationship between urban and rural places/actors/interests is acknowledged (and we accept it may not be), then how is that to be corrected- and, specifically are there valuable lessons to be drawn from existing peri-urban practice to help in this process?

PURPLE sees specific challenges for policy-makers in this area and is keen to work with them to explore:

- How they might guarantee the interests of peri-urban areas given a) their unique character and b) the unique contribution they make to the economy, environment and citizens.
- How they will design-in, and hence ensure, equity and fairness in peri-urban governance.
- How they will ensure that governance arrangements take account of peri-urban reality and do not serve to fragment such areas.
- How they propose to take due account of peri-urban governance needs alongside a) an existing “urban agenda” and b) an emerging “rural agenda”.
- How policy regarding governance can be developed and implemented so as to be consistent with policy in other subject areas.

## 8. PURPLE offer and next steps

PURPLE hopes to develop an action plan for peri-urban governance as described at section 7.

In order to achieve that we intend to:

- Showcase good-practice examples from within and beyond PURPLE member regions.
- Collaborate in joint pieces of work such as the H2020 ROBUST project where we can share lessons learned and develop policy recommendations with regard to successful governance procedures across Europe.
- Collaborate with policy-makers themselves in developing understanding of successful peri-urban governance.
- Continue to lobby and influence for the establishment and maintenance of governance arrangements that accurately, fairly, and innovatively, reflect the needs and aspirations of peri-urban areas.



PURPLE is always delighted to hear from anyone who shares our interest in this subject and is keen to explore ways in which we might collaborate for mutual benefit.

For further details of PURPLE's work and to keep up to date with our progress towards developing an agenda for peri-urban governance:

See the PURPLE website

[www.purple-eu.org/en/Publications/Topic-Papers-on-Peri-Urban-Issues](http://www.purple-eu.org/en/Publications/Topic-Papers-on-Peri-Urban-Issues)