



**Peri-Urban Regions Platform Europe conference**  
***Europe's peri-urban potential: beyond urban-rural links***  
12 November, 2009

## Summary of presentations

### Introduction

This conference, held in the headquarters of the Committee of the Regions in Brussels attracted a wide audience of politicians, policy makers and experts from across Europe's regions as well as from Brussels-based institutions and representations.

It looked at three inter-linked areas of policy where there is real potential for peri-urban regions to play a crucial role in the future:

- *Environment and climate change*
- *Territorial development*
- *Agriculture and food production*

This summary highlights some of the key points made by speakers and reactions from the audience. It should be read in conjunction with the opening speeches of Mrs Lenie Dwarshuis the President of PURPLE and Mr Luc van den Brande, the President of the Committee of the Regions which are both on the PURPLE website ([www.purple-eu.org](http://www.purple-eu.org)).

'The two instruments that are of great importance to the regions - the Common Agricultural Policy and Territorial Cohesion - need to be adapted to the new challenges that we are facing without being deprived of their substance.' *PURPLE President, Mrs Lenie Dwarshuis.*

### Facing climate change: which peri-urban environmental challenges?

**Joe Ravetz, University of Manchester**, a partner in the PLUREL project, spoke about combining climate mitigation and adaptation in peri-urban development policy. An abstract of his presentation and copies of the slides can be accessed on the PURPLE website. The predicted rise in global average temperatures which is now deemed to be inevitable will have serious implications for peri-urban areas. They are likely to induce rapid environmental stress affecting water supply, soils and ecosystems and an increase in flood damage. Peri-urban development is one of the fastest growing land uses in the EU, and is particularly vulnerable to climate change. In areas of chaotic urban sprawl, the impacts may be highest, whilst the capacity to respond would be the lowest. At the same time, a planned and strategic adaptation to climate change is possible, and quite feasible if it can be combined with other policy objectives.

A menu of adaptation strategies for peri-urban areas will need to be developed including: redesign of built environment to defend against climate pressures and impacts (heat, droughts, storms, flood events, sea level rise); protection of critical infrastructure; avoidance of high flood risk areas; green infrastructure, open space design, multi-functional land use, and ecological connectivity in the urban and peri-urban environment. In terms of consumption, urban dwellers have the potential to more 'virtuous' than rural dwellers and relative affluence can also make a contribution.

**Michel Vampouille, Vice President of Île de France** talked about the environmental challenges confronting a peri-urban region like Île-de-France 50% of the land is agricultural. As Vice President responsible for Environment, Sustainable Development and Eco-region he underlined how regional policies could tackle these challenges. For instance there will be a positive impact for the environment from the regional programme 2008-2013 for peri-urban agriculture, and the regional strategy for biodiversity has been of the utmost importance in creating green corridors in peri-urban zones. He stressed how interdependent the three sessions of this seminar were; stating that it was impossible to implement efficient environmental policies in peri-urban areas, if this was not done hand in hand with special planning and agricultural policies. And since the debate about the EU policies post-2013 is now open he advised the representative of the Commission that talking with the national level was not enough to design and implement effective environmental actions (i.e. against climate change) benefiting the entire EU territory. Finally, he saw the challenge of climate change as an opportunity for peri-urban regions, not necessarily always bringing negative impacts – for example it may speed up changes in behaviour and lifestyle choices, such as buying local produce which are beneficial for the local economy.

**George Kremlis, DG Environment**

*'Everything and everyone will be affected by climate change'. 'We need a new culture with new mitigation governance'.*

The White paper on Climate Change will have to be followed by mandatory adaptation strategies for all levels of governance including peri-urban. Better data on climate change are needed so decision makers can understand what is happening and then make the right decisions. For example work has to be done on the ground to develop data at the peri-urban level to identify the carbon footprint of such regions and enable them to mitigate and adapt.

The role of regions and peri-urban areas will become extremely important in developing new concepts of territorial cohesion accompanied by tailored strategies to face these challenges (*'strategies and action plans specific to the needs of regions'*). There is a need for action at all levels, and the investment needed to cope with climate change impacts has to be assessed. Mr Kremlis predicted that the current EU support for environmental adaptation (€100b) and indirect environmental investment (€40b) will increase in coming years.

## **Towards a balanced spatial development in peri-urban regions: which territorial policies?**

**Hans Leinfelder, Ghent University**, argued that peri-urban regions can be seen as a laboratory for creative research on future urbanisation. They need much clearer definition and recognition at EU level, as specific spaces with particular management needs. An analogy would be the classification status given under legislation such as the Birds and Habitat Directives. Could there be a 'peri-urban' Directive to enable Member States to tackle the EU peri-urban challenges? Describing his own region, Flanders, as 'one big peri-urban condition' he argued that strategic social and cultural planning policy needs to be developed to manage peri-urban open space, accommodating its multiple uses and safeguarding its important socio-cultural identity.

**Heiko Kasseckert, Director Planungsverband Frankfurt Rhein/Main** used a series of slides to demonstrate the challenge of achieving balanced spatial development in a complex peri-urban region such as Frankfurt Rhein-Main. This is above all a polycentric region with a population clustered in many municipalities, smaller centres and suburbs as well as in the city area, and an elaborate system of economic activity with a hierarchy of centres also spread throughout the region. Growth is not confined to one urban centre, indeed there are economically specialised centres throughout the region away from the core city. A 'functional area approach' is needed. Regional planning has to take account of this complex multi-layered picture to accommodate building areas, open space, agriculture and forestry, nature and landscape, the hierarchy of economic centres, transport, Green Belt networks etc.

However producing a coherent regional plan is only one part of a process towards having a successful region. The interests of a region cannot be safeguarded by the core city alone, nor by a super ordinate body – it is the region's challenge, and it is manifested in the regional stakeholders.

But their potential, the peri-urban potential, is still under-estimated and needs to be fostered – and nobody can do this alone, you need partners for it: within the region and within Europe.

**Thomas Sick Nielsen, University of Copenhagen and Annette Pierr, Leibniz-Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research**, spoke about the work of the PLUREL project - Science for Sustainable Rural-Urban Regions - which involves more than 100 researchers in 15 countries. PLUREL is looking for a European 'smart growth' approach to manage different pressures on land in peri-urban regions. There are more details of the project in an abstract available on the PURPLE website and at [www.plurel.net](http://www.plurel.net). The key end-product of the project will be the PLUREL Explorer – a platform providing structured access to state-of-the-art knowledge on rural-urban land use relationships; and to a range of more interactive tools allowing exploration and analysis of sustainability impacts, land use dynamics, quality of life effects; as well as access to maps produced in the project .

**Johan Magnusson, DG Regio** was most struck by the diversity of peri-urban areas with their mix of economic, environmental and social components. He acknowledged that the PLUREL project will also further highlight the land use conflicts so typical of these areas. The Commission needs to know what people in such areas want and he suggests a bottom up approach involving broad partnerships of stakeholders to enable a better understanding of this. It is also important to ensure that best use is made of peri-urban assets.

DG Regio started looking at urban/rural links more than 20 years ago and feels that more partnerships are needed between urban and rural areas built on common issues and common benefits. Key messages from recent seminars and consultations suggest there is a need to focus down onto functional areas; to have better coordination of EU funding streams, (and also with complementary national, regional and local funding mechanisms); and to take an integrated approach to governance, with involvement of all sectors and interests.

## **A future for peri-urban agriculture: how to bring food production closer to citizens**

**Karen Davies, Heart of England Fine Foods**, outlined the work of her organization in the West Midlands, UK, in supporting local food and drinks businesses and processors in development of profitable and sustainable markets for their products. HEFF helps with technology & innovation, supply chain development and marketing and promotion of local food and drink. Particular initiatives have included setting up an efficient and sustainable centralised distribution service for local businesses. Overall aims are to make high quality regional food more accessible, to develop local food chains, to reduce food miles and to encourage more citizens to buy 'local'. For the future HEFF will be developing opportunities for food tourism and looking to events such as the Olympic Games in 2012, for new opportunities to stimulate business for local companies.

**Antoni Diaz, Generalitat de Catalunya** spoke about peri-urban food production around Barcelona, where the regional government has been working to protect peri-urban farms, improve marketing and maintain the very high quality of local produce. The creation of agricultural parks by agreement between farmers and municipalities has been a successful mechanism for protecting potentially highly productive land from urban encroachment. Small producers who might have difficulty reaching markets have been supported. There are regular public retail markets in urban areas as well as food fairs, an information website and technical support (via a public enterprise Prodeca) with applications for EU quality labelling of products (such as chickens, artichokes, beans...).

Thus food from peri-urban areas is fresh since it has been harvested shortly before consumption, is a useful tool to protect soil and for proper water management, has a low carbon footprint and helps to maintain peri-urban landscape.

**Marina Pintar, University of Ljubljana**, another representative of the PLUREL project is working on a peri-urban case study around the coastal town of Koper in Slovenia. She spoke about ways of understanding and quantifying the threats to agricultural land near towns and cities. In the future there must be greater focus on balancing natural resources and more involvement of the public.

There is a worrying shortage of viable agricultural land in Slovenia due to its predominantly mountainous terrain. In the lowland areas agriculture competes with urbanisation, industry, and infrastructure for the same space. From 2002-2007 Slovenia lost seven hectares of agricultural land per day to other development – a trend that could not be allowed to continue. Using the Moland land use modelling tool, and looking at different scenarios has provided a range of detailed predictions which are now being used to help land use planners resolve future development conflicts in the Koper case study area and the same approach will be applied throughout Slovenia.

**Josefine Loriz-Hoffmann, DG Agriculture**, reminded the audience that EU food production is fundamental for EU citizens, but that they are unaware that the constant availability of food is a result of successful EU policies (Trade, CAP). Not only do citizens take their food security for granted until problems on supply, price or quality/safety arise, as a result of urbanisation they have also lost awareness of what good farming is about and how land and the natural environment should be managed properly. In the opinion of Mrs Loriz-Hoffmann, a greater awareness is needed on (1) more sustainable use of the resources (land, water and energy), and (2) fragility of the production systems and supply chains that provide food security. She mentioned several Rural Development measures, that would be interesting in particular for peri-urban regions, and then gave an overview of the benefits of local food production and of the pre-conditions peri-urban regions should work on, possibly by using the EFRD, if they would want to stimulate this. Finally, she looked ahead, reminding the conference of the message of Mrs Mariann Fischer Boel on the specific position and opportunities for peri-urban regions and advising PURPLE to take a position in the Barosso “EU 2020” integral people-planet-profit strategy. In her final statement, Mrs Loriz-Hoffmann called for a better balance between global and local and suggested that ‘There must be room for diversity, to involve regions to coordinate execution of policy.’

**Mr Jan Olbrycht, Member of the European Parliament** who will lead a parliamentary urban intergroup looking at cities and their surroundings, concluded the conference with some brief remarks, in which he drew attention to the value of exchange of good practice and ideas between regions and urged policy makers and politicians to look for how to ‘make it simple’ and ‘think about the problem and the challenge’.

**The PURPLE network would like to thank all the conference participants for helping make this event a success with excellent presentations and discussions.**

**The environmental, territorial and agricultural specificities of Europe’s important peri-urban zones must be taken into account. Policy makers in all these areas, and at all levels of governance, need to acknowledge that developing EU policies solely according to ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ categorisations is no longer appropriate.**

**PURPLE has now set out some key messages for each policy area: see [www.purple-eu.org](http://www.purple-eu.org) where you can also download conference’s presentations and speeches.**

**PURPLE 14 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, Stockholm, West Midlands and ZealandDenmark

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