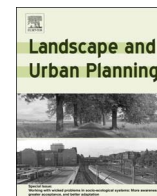


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Editorial

Special issue on sustainable planning approaches for urban peripheries

1. Aims, background and research questions

As urban systems of varying intensity and character grow worldwide, peripheries increase both in number and typology, and their growth is highly dependent on local territorial and socio-economic conditions (UN-Habitat, 2013). Peripheries are the outcome of economic and political decision-making at different scales (global, national, regional or local), including the logic of uneven geographical development in capitalist societies, which can be present in both developed and less developed countries. In some parts of the world, urban peripheries are detached from physical, social, economic, institutional and cultural networks and are thus isolated from global flows (Castells, 1989).

Approaches to sustainable planning can be considered a combination of knowledge, science and creativity to design, evaluate and implement a set of justified actions within the public domain to achieve the three major dimensions of sustainability: environmental, economic and social (Berke & Conroy, 2000). It is crucial for planning research to increase understanding of how urbanisation processes in peripheral contexts might improve sustainability of peripheries and their wider metropolitan contexts. Furthermore, despite the growing body of research on sustainable planning of urban systems, many challenges remain to integrate approaches into real processes of planning, management and design, mainly due to the separation between suppliers and users of scientific information (Brandt et al., 2013).

This Special Issue aims to increase understanding of whether and how planning approaches can achieve sustainability goals in urban peripheries. Contributions of this Special Issue addressed the following research questions:

- What are the characteristics and peculiarities of urban peripheries worldwide?
- What are some approaches to sustainable planning of urban peripheries?
- How should existing planning approaches be updated or reformulated for more effective employment in urban peripheries?
- Which are some uncertainties and limitations about the effectiveness of these approaches?
- Which trade-offs can be identified and addressed by sustainable planning approaches within the context of urban peripheries?

These research questions were elaborated and discussed in a symposium held during the IUFRO-Landscape Ecology conference in Tartu, Estonia, in August 2015, in which guest editors and contributing authors participated.

2. Structure and themes of the special issue

Articles included in this Special Issue cover case studies that vary in both scale and geographical coverage, describing cases in eight countries on four continents (Peru, Chile, China, Malaysia, Ghana, Switzerland, Slovenia, Scotland, Belarus, Russia). Most research about sustainable planning has been done within the Northern Hemisphere (Cilliers, du Toit, Cilliers, Drewes, & Retief, 2014), but knowledge and case studies from developing countries are fundamental to get new insights about the potentials and limits of sustainable planning approaches. For this reason, research and case studies from developing countries were important to this Special Issue, which includes a literature review (Geneletti, La Rosa, Spyra, & Cortinovis, 2017), essays on particular peripheral contexts (Haller, 2017; Shkaruba, Kireyeu, & Likhacheva, 2017), studies developing and testing decision support methods and tools (Barau, 2017; Fan, Xu, Yue, & Chen, 2017; Inostroza, 2017; Zlender & Thompson, 2017) as well as planning experiences (Grêt-Regamey, Altwegg, Sirén, van Strien, & Weibel, 2017; Kleemann et al., 2017).

2.1. Main themes and topics of the articles

The existing literature about sustainable planning and peripheries was reviewed by Geneletti et al. (2017), including 102 articles dealing with sustainable planning issues in urban peripheries. The relatively limited amount of literature highlighted that peripheral contexts are not central in research on sustainable planning approaches and that there is a lack of classification of peripheries that would be useful for planning. The reviewed articles describe planning approaches that are mainly context-specific and solution-oriented, aimed at responding to local socio-economic and ecological issues, and their transferability to other geographical contexts is limited. However, the authors identified some approaches to increase social-ecological opportunities and offer more sustainable food production for the peri-urban population.

A frequent topic addressed by articles of the Special Issue is how to plan for equity in accessibility to urban green spaces in peripheral contexts.

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Green spaces located outside the urban core—such as woodlands, fringe forests, country/agricultural parks, peri-urban open spaces—are sometimes appreciated by users for recreation and leisure activities even more than intensively maintained green areas because they provide a diverse kind of ‘nature’ and satisfy different recreational needs (Rupprecht, Byrne, Ueda, & Lo, 2015). Fan et al. (2017) addressed the issues of accessibility of greenspace at the metropolitan level for Shanghai, measuring the spatial-temporal accessibility for residents to different—in type and size—public urban green spaces located in peri-urban areas. Green spaces were characterised using accessibility and other indicators of quality (e.g., spaciousness, quietness, affordability and area size). The work’s results identified hot and cold spots of accessibility deserving particular attention from urban planning. Accessibility of green spaces in peri-urban contexts has been analysed from a more social perspective by Žlender and Thompson (2017), who explored the preference of residents for the use of peri-urban open spaces in two cities (Ljubljana and Edinburgh) in order to understand factors that affect the use and accessibility of these spaces. Results gathered from questionnaires and focus groups showed that citizens in Ljubljana use green wedges quite often because these spaces allow easy access to the city-centre, while the green belt in Edinburgh is used for recreational purposes much less frequently than the other green spaces present within the city.

Participatory planning and co-planning are explored by Grêt-Regamey et al. (2017) and Haller (2017). Grêt-Regamey et al. (2017) proposed that the engagement of stakeholders and other actors can be effectively facilitated through visualisation tools and generation of interactive 3D maps of development scenarios; hence, this could contribute to promoting the procedural aspects of sustainability. Haller (2017) stressed the importance of including smallholder farmers in peri-urban areas from the early stages of the planning process. He found that new dwellers of peri-urban areas demonstrated a surprising empathy toward smallholders—who perceive a number of advantages and disadvantages of urban development in the lower Shullcas Valley in the Peruvian Andes. For this reason, the improved mutual understanding would probably facilitate collaborative planning procedures in complex rural–urban peripheries and with shared solutions to the trade-offs that arise from peripheral development.

An important theme emerging from many articles is a need for new forms of spatial governance for the fast changing territories of urban peripheries. Geneletti et al. (2017) found that the ‘metropolitan’ condition of contemporary peripheries requires addressing more complex spatial relations than those between a specific peripheral area and its reference core city. One of the most relevant is the cross-administrative boundary phenomenon, according to which, municipalities belonging to the same metropolitan area can address the same issues in different ways. Fan et al. (2017) provided an example that concerns the accessibility of green spaces. These authors emphasized that the spatial pattern of green space accessibility should be considered at different levels (overall, neighborhood, district and city/metro-levels) in order to evaluate where green spaces are most needed. Shkaruba et al. (2017) analysed the dramatic changes in institutional systems of the former USSR, showing how the legacy of socialist planning systems (with typical top-down spatial governance systems) still strongly influences the management of urban developments in peripheral areas of Belarus and Russia. The authors describe the properties of the rural-urban peripheries of Mahilioŭ and Pskov and the land-use pressure on ecosystems; they discuss the ‘regulation dilemma’ in Belarus and ‘sovereign democracy’ in Russia. Barau (2017) focussed on the negative outcomes generated by land-use planning decisions in peripheral areas of Malaysia. The author analysed changes to the landscape that were driven by planning and development of special economic zones established by national government to promote investments in the peripheries. Among local residents, he found widespread dissatisfaction with the effects of these investments, including changes in the composition and structure of the landscape.

Informal urban development is addressed by the articles of Inostroza (2017) and Kleemann et al. (2017). Inostroza (2017) developed a method to spatially characterize and quantify the level of informality in the peripheries of three capital cities of Latin America based on specific material features of urban development. Kleemann et al. (2017) analysed the main drivers of patterns of peri-urban development in two study areas in Ghana using an interdisciplinary approach that combined expert interviews, literature review and land-use change analysis. Their results demonstrate how different patterns reflect both the effectiveness of existing land-use planning instruments and the diverging geographical, historical, cultural and economic characteristics of the two study areas.

3. Answering research questions

3.1. What are the characteristics and peculiarities of urban peripheries worldwide?

Many contributions addressed the changing character of urban peripheries during socio-ecological transitions. Shkaruba et al. (2017) analysed examples of urban peripheries of cities in the former USSR undergoing severe social and economic changes, in which significant pressures for urban development in rural-urban fringes started after the economic transition in the 1990s. As a side effect of the very restrictive and centralized planning system of the former USSR, urban planning has often been seen as an obstacle to modern development of the city. Consequently, existing, binding planning regulations have frequently been violated in urban peripheries. The implementation of land-use plans has been further hindered by the overlap of two types of institutions: those functioning before economic transition, and those established afterwards. Shkaruba et al. (2017) presented two case studies of post-Soviet cities in Belarus and Russia where rural-urban peripheries went through a socio-economic transition that display a complex interplay of socialist and post-socialist institutions.

Peripheries in Latin America have been explored by Inostroza (2017), who discussed informal urban developments in settlements in Lima, Santiago del Chile, and Bogotá as new urban peripheral contexts that are quickly built up and grow rapidly as part of the wider metropolitan context. The author stressed the significance of informality of these peripheries, and the severe health and safety hazards, environmental degradation, pollution and inadequate sanitary conditions resulting from unsuitable settlement conditions. These peripheries vary in their spatial pattern—e.g., highly compact and attached to the more compact urban area in Bogotá, highly fragmented in Lima, and diffuse with high fragmentation in Santiago. Acknowledging the difficulty in finding a particular characterization for urban peripheries in Latin America, Inostroza (2017) underlines that the growth of urban peripheries is common in all medium-big cities of Latin America.

The issue of development of informal settlements is also analysed by Kleemann et al. (2017), who identified weak forms of planning and governance as key driving forces, together with population growth, immigration from the countryside, and job opportunities in Ghana. The authors also analysed the creation of new urban centres in Ghana, where the lack of structured urban planning instruments has generated uncontrolled sprawl of new settlements. Specifically, the authors demonstrated how different peri-urban patterns in the north and south of Ghana reflect the weak effectiveness of land-use planning instruments, as well as differences in population growth, markets, industry (especially oil industry) and land tenure. Unplanned and uncontrolled city growth at the fringes often results in spatially inefficient use of the land, with scattered building densities, uneven building sizes, mixed land-uses and generally fragmented development (Kleemann et al., 2017).

Haller (2017) studied the particular peri-urban context of Huancayo Metropolitan in the Peruvian Andes, where urban development is affecting

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