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## **1. Introduction**

The concept of urban-rural relationships is beginning to appear more often in the academic literature as well as policy and programming documents. The evolution of the concept has a long history in the study of economics, geography and regional planning. This paper traces some of the historical background of the concept and identifies how it is being used at the present time. The paper is divided in two main parts. In the first part we discuss how the term urban-rural relationship was coined to mark a departure from the traditional view of urban-rural dichotomy: the existence of two distinct and opposing perspectives that have influenced the conceptualisation of urban-rural relationships. The first of these perspectives, the anti-urban view, can be traced back to rural-urban migration during the Industrial Revolution and the social, economic, environmental and health problems that this migration caused. The second perspective, the pro-urban view, sees urbanisation in terms of natural progress and development and regards cities as generators and centres of culture, knowledge, innovation and economic growth. In the first part of the paper we draw primarily on the British experience and debates in the discussion of urban-rural dichotomy. In the second part of the paper, when we look at more recent stages in the evolution of the concept of urban-rural relationships, we shift our attention to the developments at the European scale. Here we focus on key academic texts as well as policy and programming literature with a particular focus on the European dimension. We show that over recent years, there is evidence to suggest that there has been a gradual change in perception and policy orientation in various policy arenas towards consideration of the linkages and interrelationships between urban and rural areas.

## **2. Urbanisation and the urban-rural dichotomy**

The history of urbanisation can be traced back to about 5000 years ago when the first cities began to emerge in Mesopotamia. These, however, were very small cities surrounded and dependant on an overwhelming majority of rural people. The slow upward drift of urbanisation took place in the long medieval period and did not gathered pace until the Industrial Revolution. According to Davis (1965), before 1850 there was no society that could be defined as predominantly urbanised and by 1900 only Britain could be considered as an urbanised society. Today, half of the world's six billion population are urban dwellers and all industrial nations are highly urbanised. Moreover, from the mid-20th Century the developing countries have also begun to urbanise not only more rapidly than the industrial nations at the same time, but also more rapidly than the industrial nations did at the heyday of their urban growth. The United Nations estimates that, by 2006, more people will live in urban areas than in rural areas for the first time in history (UNCHS, 1996 and 2001)

The accelerated rate of urbanisation and its associated social problems provided the context for the development of an urban-rural dichotomy that was particularly prevalent at the turn of the nineteenth century. This was a time when many European countries were experiencing a rapid transformation from largely agrarian to industrial economies and when North American cities were transformed by waves of in-migration from the rural south and from Europe. For a long time, the urban-rural dichotomy led to two opposing schools of thought. At one end of the spectrum was the anti-urban view which idealised and regretted the disappearance of rural life; at the other end was the pro-

urban view which considered urbanisation as the engine of progress, innovation and modernisation.

In places where the process of urbanisation has been most acute, such as Britain, this dichotomy has been mirrored in the solutions to the evils of the growing Nineteenth Century cities. It has led to policies which treated town and country as separate entities, each with its own investment and development programmes. It has left its mark on spatial planning policies, too. At the time when urban-rural dichotomy was at its peak, any attempt to develop an integrated approach to the urban and rural development was seen as leading to a degenerate mixture. For example, criticising Ebenezer Howard's vision of Town-Country, Thomas Sharp wrote in 1932:

Tradition has broken down. ... Rural influences neutralise the town. Urban influence neutralise the country. In a few years all will be neutrality. The strong, masculine virility of the town; the softer beauty, the richness, the fruitfulness of that mother of men, the countryside, will be debased into one sterile, hermaphrodite beastliness (Sharp, 1932:11).

### ***The anti-urban view***

In Britain, the underlying factor for the accelerated urbanisation during and after the Industrial Revolution was rural-urban migration at a rate high enough to exceed the cities' high mortality rate. This increasing influx of rural population to urban areas and the inability of cities to effectively manage the resulting social, economic and health problems were the main culprits for the development of the anti-urban view. The rural poor who moved into London, for example, were better off than they had been on the land, yet their concentration in slums and their proximity to the rich created a new set of social relationships and social perceptions (Hall, 1994). It gave birth to anti-urban views which saw urbanisation as a destructive process leading to overcrowded, disease and poverty-stricken slum cities and the breakdown of social cohesion. According to the anti-urban view, if urbanisation (rural-urban migration) could not be stopped, it was imperative that the countryside should be protected from the sprawl of urban areas and the invasion of what was seen as the urban way of life. Similar views were reflected in the resistance against what was called the 'blight' of suburbia:

The extension of the towns must be stopped, building must be restricted to sharply defined areas, and such re-housing of the population as may be necessary must be carried on within these areas (Joad, 1938:81-82).

The attempts to neatly separate towns from the country, to restrict development within the city boundaries, and to protect the countryside from urban expansion preoccupied the founding fathers of the planning movement such as Patrick Geddes, Raymond Unwin and Patrick Abercrombie (Munton, 1983). It also significantly shaped the underlying orthodoxies of the post war planning system in Britain particularly as reflected in the principle of urban containment (Ward, 1994, Hall et al, 1973).

The literature of the time was peppered with anti-urban sentiments and with a desire to return to an idealised rural life. In fact, this was (and arguably still is) an option open only to the middle classes who eventually began to move out of the cities and into the suburbs, leaving behind the smoke and the dirt of the congested cities. Hall (1994) argues that half a century of town and country planning in Britain has ensured that the country life remains to be the preserve of the wealthy and the leisured people.

Although cities of the twenty first century are very different to those of the Victorian times and there has been a resurgence of city living at least to some extent, particularly amongst young professionals, the ability to live in the countryside is still seen as a sign of

status and as such has remained as attractive as ever before. This reflects a paradox. On the one hand, with the exception of city states such as Hong Kong or Singapore, no country in the world is more urban than England and none has been urban for longer. On the other hand, or may be for that very reason, there is no culture in the world whose identity is more bound up with an image of the countryside than the English.

The desire to live in the countryside can be seen as the other face of the anti-urban view, largely based on an idealised perception of rural life where a flourishing agricultural industry supports a socially cohesive and morally superior community of neighbourly rural population. However, this idyllic view of rural life has been partly responsible for two phenomena.

The first is a failure to observe the growing problems of under-development in rural areas, which often stem from agricultural decline coupled with little economic diversification and a lack of access to jobs, education and the kind of services that bring life to villages. In recent years, despite increases in the rural population in Britain, there has been a long-term trend in the loss of services in rural areas. More than one third of all villages have no shop, post office or school, and more than half of all villages have no general store, doctor or a daily bus service. Between 1965 and 1990, around 15% of rural communities lost their last general store or food shop (DETR, 2000). Supermarkets have eroded the profitability of smaller shops and forced some of these out of business. Since 1990, 4,000 more food shops in rural areas have closed (ibid). On average about 200 post offices have closed each year since 1980 (Cabinet Office, 2000). Closures of rural schools increased in the 1970s, reaching an annual peak of 127 in 1983 and continuing at around 30 a year up to 1997 (DETR, 2000). According to some reports, the loss of banks, garages and pubs in rural areas is continuing (see for example Cabinet Office, 1999).

Contrary to the idyllic rural myth it is not unusual to discover hidden pockets of rural poverty in a sea of regional affluence. In some rural parts of Gloucestershire (in the Cotswolds for example), a third of the population has a post-tax income of £7000 or less which is half the national average. This is despite Gloucestershire being one of the richest counties in England with an unemployment rate at around 2% below the national average and an average income higher than in the country as a whole (The Economist, 2000). Here, the cumulative problems of the BSE crisis, the strength of the pound and the long-term reduction in agricultural subsidies have led to what is called a 'rural crisis'. Recent studies on social exclusion in rural areas have shown that there is considerable inequality hidden amongst the apparent affluence of rural Britain, and "those who are socially excluded in one way or another may face particular difficulties because of their very 'invisibility'" (Shucksmith, 2000:24).

The second phenomenon associated with the idealisation of rural life and the desire to live in countryside is the increasing rural immigration: people moving out of cities to live in the nearby villages. Since 1971, the rural population in England has grown by 17 percent compared with a total population growth of 4 percent (The Economist, 1998). Much of the growth has come from people moving out of cities and also from the spread of retirement homes. It is estimated that an average of 17,00 people each week are moving from urban to rural areas (ibid). This is at a time when, according to the 2001 census, agriculture employs only 1.6 percent of the UK workforce. Hence, these new rural immigrants are unlikely to be supportive of traditional country pursuits. Many are rich urbanites who work in cities and live in rural areas for the beauty of landscape, not for the work opportunities. The urban-rural migration has tended to be highly socially selective leading to a progressive gentrification of the countryside particularly through competition for scarce housing (Phillips, 1993)

The countryside in the South East Region of England, for example, is home for a disproportionate number of the nations' most well qualified, highly paid and influential

employees, entrepreneurs and decision-makers who balance their busy lifestyles with the tranquillity of the countryside within comparatively easy reach of London. These residents along with the visitors have made the countryside of the South East the most affluent rural area in the country. Their consumption is seen as critical to the health of the regional economy. However, this growing prosperity has its downside. In-migration coupled with out-commuting amongst those with few demands on the rural economy has cumulative adverse impacts. The house prices are increasing, making it unaffordable for the local community, demand for local services is reduced and the activities that in the past have provided jobs for local people are threatened. Local young people in search of job opportunity tend to move out, unbalancing the demographic profile in rural areas. The long-term outcome of these processes is a rural community which becomes increasingly difficult to sustain socially, economically and environmentally (SEEDA, 1999).

From an anti-urban viewpoint, what such influx of urban population does to rural way of life is not dissimilar to what could have happened by physical sprawl of London, had it not been for its Green Belt. The urban-rural move in the most affluent regions of Europe is now leading to a growing trend towards service-less, car-dependant dormitory villages for affluent commuters. This trend is accompanied not only by the rising pressures from development and tourism, but also the structural reforms across the agriculture industry leading to profound changes on the pattern of land use and consequently landscape. Hence, the combined effects of these developments are threatening the very 'rurality' of the countryside which has long been cherished as a unique English identity.

### ***The pro-urban view***

The pro-urban view sees urbanisation as a progressive process: as a milestone in the evolution of humanity into civilization. Proponents of this view argue that the history of scientific and technological innovation and that of civilisation itself is inseparable from the history of towns and cities. The emergence of city life is seen as giving rise to writing, to the authority of the state, and to the complex economies based on complex social systems (Le Gates and Stout, 1996). Cities are seen as the incubators of advanced culture and repositories of scientific and artistic knowledge and innovation. Historically, this has been reflected in the close association between economic development and urbanisation. Despite the squalor and misery that characterised the working-class districts of the 19th Century slums, the pro-urban view celebrates them as the predecessors to the modern city which today is the engine of economic growth.

The pro-urban view sees urbanisation as an inevitable development: a cycle through which nations go in their transition from agrarian to industrial society. It celebrates the rural-urban migration and focuses on its management rather than curtailment. This migration process is seen as finite and in those countries where the intensive urbanisation began within the past hundred years its end is now in sight. However, an end to urbanisation does not necessary mean an end to economic growth or urban expansion because, contrary to popular belief, urbanisation and the growth of cities are not the same even though historically they have coincided. For example, Davis (1965) defines urbanisation as the rate of change of the proportion of the urban population.<sup>1</sup> As such, an increase can take place without the growth of cities by, for example, a decline in the rural population. Similarly, urban populations can grow without an increase in urbanisation provided that rural population grows at an equal or greater rate.

Hence, despite the slow down of urbanisation in some countries, cities continue to grow upwards and outwards in both developed and developing countries. And, it is this relentless growth that continues to fuel the urban-rural dichotomy in public debates.

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<sup>1</sup> Others have adopted a wider definition of urbanisation based on economic, cultural or sociological criteria. Louis Wirth's pioneering work on 'urbanism as a way of life' is a notable example (Wirth, 1938).

Evidence of the continuation of such polarised view was displayed in the protests by the British Countryside Alliance in 1998 and 2002. Although this was triggered by the threat of a ban on fox hunting, it also became a mechanism for opposing the eradication of what was perceived as a 'rural' way of life through encroachment of new housing in rural areas and the increasing rights to roam in countryside. The protest not only illustrated the diversity of what is perceived as 'rural' issues and the complexity of rural politics, it also showed that the urban-rural dichotomy has remained as powerful a view as ever before in Britain and possibly elsewhere in Europe. Similarly, in developing countries some of the justifications for human settlement policies that aim at slowing down the rate of rural to urban migration or to curtail urban sprawl can be traced back to a view based on rural-urban divide (Mutizwa-Mangiza, 1999).

### **3. Urban-rural linkages**

It is within this context that in recent years, the concept of urban-rural relationships has emerged as a way of challenging this longstanding and persistent dichotomy and promoting an integrated conception of cities and countryside based on both their spatial and functional interdependencies.

Whilst such interdependencies are not new, their dynamics are far more complex than the traditional simple reciprocal exchanges between cities and villages. It is possible to identify two distinct phases in these reciprocal exchanges. The first phase occurred when societies of north west Europe were predominantly rural and cities' relationships with rural areas were characterised by the consumption of agricultural produce by urban dwellers in exchange for cities' industrial and commercial products. In the second phase, after the Industrial Revolution, the balance of urban-rural relationships began to shift towards an increasing dependency of rural areas on urban economies.

Today, we seem to be witnessing a third phase whereby the urban-rural linkages are moving beyond the single one-way exchanges and demonstrate a more complex and dynamic web of interdependencies which is shaping the fortunes of cities and countryside alike. For example, as Howard Newby argues, "for the first time since the Industrial Revolution technological change is allowing rural areas to compete on an equal basis with towns and cities for employment" (quoted in Marsden et al, 1993:2). It is this recognition of the complexity of urban-rural relationships which has gained a new political salience both at national and European levels. This focus on urban-rural continuum is justified by the visible and invisible flows of people, capital, goods, information and technology between urban and rural areas.

However, whilst there is considerable literature on both rural and urban development issues, there is much less concerning the linkages between them. The same can be said for spatial planning policy at various levels, which has tended to address urban and rural issues as separate policy areas. Whilst rural communities may be facing separate and distinct challenges, as may other specific communities, when it comes to policy formulation and programming, such challenges can not be addressed in isolation from their wider context. It is this recognition that is the central plank of urban-rural relationships. The need for integrated policy making is the focus of the debate rather than the denial of some of the unique characteristics of and challenges faced by the rural communities.

Research on the issue of urban rural relationships is further complicated by the variety of definitions of what constitutes an urban or a rural area. Various definitions of urban and rural areas exist, but all give somewhat different views of what is urban and what is rural. However, despite the lack of agreed definitions, it is widely acknowledged that unlike in medieval times when the defensive walls of towns provided a clear physical boundary between urban and rural areas, today both physical and functional boundaries of urban and rural areas are becoming ever more blurred. Indeed, the increasing

complexity of the pattern of economic organisation, which underlies the urban/rural distinction, has undermined this same distinction (National Statistics, 2002). Hence, while England is predominantly 'rural' in physical terms, in socio-economic terms it is overwhelmingly 'urban' (op cit). However, even in physical terms many places are experiencing a gradual distortion of the urban and rural boundaries, a phenomena predicted a long time ago by commentators such as Wells who in 1902 anticipated that:

The city will diffuse itself until it has taken up considerable areas and many of the characteristics of what is now country ... The country will take itself many of the qualities of the city. The old antitheses will ... cease, the boundary lines will altogether disappear ... To receive the daily newspaper a few hours late will be the extreme measure of rurality save a few remote islands and inaccessible places (Wells, 1902: 70-71).

However, it was only in the 1960s when the spatial linkages between urban and rural areas became a common concern when urban analysts turned their attention away from the city and towards the city-region. In his spatial conception of the future, Melvin Webber rejected the view that "urban and rural comprise a dualism that should be clearly expressed in the physical and spatial form of the city, that orderliness depends upon boundedness" (Webber, 1963: 34). Lionel March, writing about the 'hyper urban society' in which the distinction between urban and rural has been surpassed, argued that, "quite literally, it [the hyper urban society] is a society that has transcended the historic and distinct urban and rural ways of life" (March, 1969: 4).

In terms of policy development, organisations such as the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements were amongst the first who adopted a view based on urban-rural linkages to promote a middle position rather than a dualism between what is seen as urban and what is seen as rural (Mutizwa-Mangiza, 1999).

By contrast, the European Union (EU) has been slow in adopting an integrated approach and has only recently begun to promote the concept. In 1994, for example, the Commission's publication on spatial development, Europe 2000+, made a few tentative steps towards recognising the relationships between urban and rural areas. Notably, it discussed the role of small and medium-sized cities and their role in providing administrative and other basic services to surrounding areas, especially rural areas (European Commission, 1994). In 1999, the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) highlighted the functional interrelationships of urban areas with their surrounding countryside and the need to move away from the compartmentalisation of policies (European Commission, 1999). The ESDP also pointed to the danger of regarding urban-rural linkages as homogenous and universal across Europe and noted that the development patterns and prospects in rural areas may differ greatly from one area to another. Hence, it recommended that spatial development strategies must take into account local and regional conditions, characteristics and requirements. The ESDP called for a re-evaluation of the relationships between city and countryside, based on the integrated treatment of the city and countryside as functional and spatial entities with diverse relationships and interdependencies. More importantly, it strongly argued for the development 'urban-rural partnerships'. It pointed that opportunities offered by urban areas are often complementary to rural areas and, towns and cities should be seen as partners and not competitors.

There have also been other developments at the EU level. For example, since the mid-1990s, the European Structural Funds have stimulated the gradual development of the relationship between rural and regional development policies through the Objective 5b programmes. The current INTERREG Programme acknowledges the significance of rural development in the economic, social and environmental health of the European regions and stresses that, there is a need for urban-rural and inter-rural co-operation to provide

a decent level of services and to solve common problems (Interreg North Sea Programme Secretariat, 2001).

However, such views have not yet fully penetrated other EU policy areas, notably EU agricultural policy. Although this is gradually changing into rural development policy, the interdependency of rural areas and their surrounding towns and cities have not been fully considered in policy terms. The only notable change of direction came from the Agenda 2000 reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in 1999 when the new Rural Development Regulation (one of the main pillars of the CAP) was established. The Rural Development Regulation brought together environmental management and rural development measures within Rural Development Plans.

Overall, a review of recent policy development within the European Commission undertaken as part of the Study Programme for European Spatial Planning (SPESP) concluded that up to 2000 the EU urban and rural policy domain had remained largely untouched by the integrated approach (Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung, 2001). Similarly, in terms of urban policy, cities were often viewed in isolation from their regional context in the past. However, our interpretation and conclusion is somewhat different – we see that there has been a change in perception and policy orientation in various EU policy arenas over recent years (albeit slowly) and the issue of urban-rural relationships has gained more importance. There is an increasing understanding of the following key issues with regard to urban-rural relationships:

- rural-urban linkages need to be understood and addressed in the context of globalisation trends in terms of, for example, systems of production, finance, trade and labour markets
- the conventional view of rural areas as equivalent to agriculture is no longer reflective of the reality of either rural regions or the rural component of rural-urban relationships
- urban-rural relationships add a significant dimension to understanding the key territorial development issues and formulating effective policies to address them
- urban-rural relationships need to be strengthened in a way that benefits both urban and rural populations
- realising the potential benefits of urban rural linkages rests not only on strengthening these linkages but also mitigating their negative impacts

#### **4. Implications and Conclusions**

In this paper, we have tried to illustrate that the concept of urban-rural relationships has its roots in various disciplines, including economics, geography and regional planning. We have outlined the existence of two distinct and opposing perspectives that have influenced the conceptualisation of urban-rural relationships and traced their evolution. We trace the first of these perspectives, the anti-urban view, back to rural-urban migration during the Industrial Revolution and the social, economic, environmental and health problems that this migration caused. Meanwhile, we see the second perspective, the pro-urban view, as one that regards urbanisation in terms of natural progress and development and regards cities as generators and centres of culture, knowledge, innovation and economic growth. In our view, the concept of urban-rural relationships marks a departure from the two opposing perspectives of the urban-rural dichotomy.

In the second part of the paper we have looked at more recent stages in the evolution of the concept of urban-rural relationships, looking at both academic texts as well as policy and programming literature. We suggest that, over recent years, there has been a gradual change in perception and policy orientation in various policy arenas towards consideration of the linkages and interrelationships between urban and rural areas and that the issue of urban-rural relationships has gained more importance. The concept of urban-rural relationships is frequently used as a way of challenging this longstanding and

persistent dichotomy between anti-urban and pro-urban perspectives, and promoting an integrated conception of cities and countryside based on both their spatial and functional interdependencies. Today, many urban-rural relationships are moving beyond simple one-way exchanges to a more complex and dynamic web of interdependencies which is shaping the fortunes of cities and countryside alike. It is this recognition of the complexity of urban-rural relationships which has gained a new political salience both at national and European levels.

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