

RAZPRAVE

THE RURAL-URBAN FRINGE: ACTUAL PROBLEMS AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

AVTOR

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ABSTRACT

The rural-urban fringe: actual problems and future perspectives

The rural-urban fringe is undergoing remarkable structural, physiognomic and functional changes. Due to a significant drain of purchasing power from the urban core to the periphery new forms of suburbanization are spreading. Large-scale shopping centres and malls, entertainment complexes, business and industrial parks have led not only to a serious competition between the city centres and the new suburban enterprises but also among various suburban communities themselves. The pull of demand for development areas and new transport facilities have caused prices for building land to rise dramatically thus pushing remaining agriculture and detached housing still further outside. These processes are discussed generally and by the example of the Graz Metropolitan Area.

KEYWORDS

rural-urban fringe, planning principles, urban sprawl, regional development program, shopping center, globalization, agriculture, residential development

IZVLEČEK

Obmestje: aktualni problemi in bodoče perspektive

Obmestje (mestno obrobje) je prostor velikih strukturnih, fiziognomskih in funkcijskih sprememb. Zaradi selitve nakupovalnih aktivnosti iz mestnega središča na obrobje se širijo nove oblike suburbanizacije. Velika nakupovalna središča in nakupovalna sprehajališča, zabavišna središča ter poslovni in industrijski parki so poleg resnega tekmovanja med mestnimi središči in obmestnimi poslovnimi združenji povzročili tudi tekmovanje med različnimi obmestnimi skupnostmi. Zaradi rastočega povpraševanja po poslovnih površinah in novih prometnih povezavah so cene stavbnih zemljišč izjemno narasle in zato potisnile preostanke kmetijstva in soseske individualnih hiš še bolj na obrobje. Članek obravnava omenjene procese na splošno in na primeru graškega metropolitanskega območja.

KLJUČNE BESEDE

obmestje, načrtovalska načela, širjenje mestnih območij, regionalni razvojni program, nakupovalno središče, globalizacija, kmetijstvo, stanovanjski razvoj

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1 Introduction

The turn from the 20th to the 21st century will be impressed on the memory of urban geographers by processes like urban dissolution, functional destabilisation, gentrification, urban blight, regionalization, and besides others, globalization.

There is no doubt about evidence of the processes mentioned above, yet, how »global« are they, how do they affect our lives, our perceptions, the images of traditional rural and urban landscapes? What about the future of these landscape types? Can or should geographers still work on these stereotypes or is there something in between? And how do we define non-urban or non-rural landscapes? Is it sufficient to call them »intermediate« or simply »rurbanc« landscapes? When cities burst the chains of their fortifications, at the latest, the dichotomy between »rural« and »urban« evidently began to dissolve. Urban sprawl has physically visualized the new development but was it accomplished in the peoples' minds also? When city-dwellers give up their urban residences in order to settle in the countryside does that change their attitudes, behaviour, life-styles? And how about rural migrants moving into cities? Are they thinking »urban« whence they have joined the urban community?

We may be witnesses of single personal fates when people mentally failed to take roots in their new environment and literature has in many cases been occupied with such stories but in our today's society nobody really seems to care very much about such considerations. This is mainly because the revolutions that have been taking place during the recent decades in the fields of information technology, news transmission and transport have enabled almost every single person on our planet to learn about almost every other place on its surface via internet or World Wide Web. Global information and, at least theoretically, the possibility of global mobility are some of the clues to the understanding of present local, regional and global mass exchange of human resources.

However, how really global i. e. multinational or transnational are these phenomena? Apart from the necessity and importance of viewing urbanization as a world-wide process we must not forget about its local and regional characteristics. This article, therefore, concentrates on practical experiences from the Austrian province of Styria not neglecting, however, general trends of the »rurbanization«-process.

2 General planning principles (the example of Styria in Austria) and the regional concept of the rural-urban fringe

It is quite obvious that in the recent past the focus of interest within urbanized areas has shifted from the urban core to the marginal areas. Although it is still the rural-urban fringe where the most dynamic changes as to land use, economic development, social change or construction activities can be observed planning and policy making no longer only concentrate on traditional guiding principles such as urban places or rural areas and the phenomena associated with them but on regions. »The region is the city« was the meaningful title of the 1998 annual conference of the German academy of regional research and planning (*Akademie für Raumforschung und Landesplanung*) and it took up the ongoing discussion on whether cities of the future will be regions of the future (Hesse and Schmit 1998).

The concentration of corporate headquarters' as urban functions in a few cities of world wide importance is the result of internationalisation of business services, accountancy, and advertising. Many corporate activities concentrate (mainly but not only) in the CBD of very large cities but many have shifted to the fringe (Vienna, millennium tower, UN-City, Wienerberg) because of their access to office space, closeness to highway entry and airport, business services, telecommunications or government offices. Improved communications now give them control of large areas and access to other large world cities. The space consuming extension of the rural-urban fringe has left the legal city limits proper far behind and comprises a number of independent communities. Those in Austria within their own sphere

of operation execute important local planning agenda like the issue of land use, zoning and local development plans.

Nevertheless the general regional planning principles as issued in the Styrian regional planning act of 1974 (last revision 1986) in §3(1) demand very strictly the subordination of regional subdivision plans under overall planning requirements, not neglecting, however, the structures and necessities of spatial subsections. Some additional planning principles of the above law worth to be mentioned are the following:

The postulation to reach an understanding on measures to be taken by the local authorities especially as far as the territorial structure and development or the image of the landscape are concerned.

The significance of the above principle must be seen under the aspect that features of landscape usually transgress community limits.

- The provision of sound health and adequate living conditions for the population by securing natural balance and sustainability:

That also means keeping environmental impacts low, and quality control of environmental properties (air, water, soil, animal and plant life).

- Energy supply must follow the postulate of energy saving.
- The well-balanced supply with economical, societal and cultural facilities must be in conformity with the number of inhabitants and the regional carrying capacity.
- Areas best suitable for living as to their site and climatic conditions should be reserved for this purpose.
- Good future prospects of economic development are to be achieved for example by providing ample space for the expansion and foundation of existing or new enterprises. Potential conflicts with other forms of land use should be avoided.
- Private and public utilities must be offered the preconditions to meet the regional and local population's requirements. Enterprises of regional influence should be provided with special locations that guarantee equal access and optimal conditions for the supply with consumer goods, private and public services.

Many communes within the rural-urban fringe have been taking this mandate too serious, i. e. they were offering disproportionately large areas for the creation of new shopping-malls, drive-in facilities, garden centres, etc. In the case of lacking binding regional development plans this not only may lead to undesired competition between single communities of the fringe area but also between the fringe and the core city. These problems will be discussed later.

- The natural conditions, especially soil and groundwater quality, favouring agriculture must be secured and protected against competitive patterns of land use.
- Traffic infrastructure has to be adopted to the goals of regional development in order to provide best connections with central places and structural improvements.
- Areas suitable for recreation need further development.
- Special emphasis must be laid on the protection of typical cultural and natural landscapes.
- Urban sprawl and unplanned settlement must be avoided.
- Development zones need an evaluation as to size, form, function and economic potential.
- Historically important parts of the built environment must be protected.

Reflecting the above regional planning principles makes it possible to compare them with the region's »as is condition«. Regional planning goals must find their outcome in the zoning plans of the communities, regional or provincial development plans according to the hierarchical structure of planning authorities in Austria. Today's functional regions create very special problems that only rarely correspond with administrative or political units. That makes integrating planning policy for the rural urban fringe a challenge to politicians, planners, officials and scientists.

We do have to accept that at least within the western civilized world new urban design principles and needs for planning have evolved from the fact that even for smaller and medium-size cities his-

toric scales and sights have lost much of their former importance. Urban regions in many cases have replaced the traditional more or less clearly defined city of the past.

The core-periphery contrasts and linkages of dependency and exploitation are a dynamic phenomenon not only in the sense of movements of wealth from the periphery to the core or vice versa, but also in accommodating change and moving from the periphery through the semi-periphery towards the core.

Although urban sprawl is not a phenomenon of recent development it has reached a new dimension of self-dynamics.

Generally speaking we can say that in many cases today the rural urban fringe must no longer be seen as a mere spatial extension of the city proper. On the contrary, it has emancipated itself from the core in many respects. If only we consider the big shopping malls, cinema complexes or office buildings that are still expanding in the periphery we are witnesses of a dramatic shift of former central urban functions into the urban fringe areas with all the consequences and conflicts that go hand in hand with that movement: just take the big international airport centres as an example. But there is much evidence that the increasing regional emancipation of the rural urban fringe towards greater fiscal, economic and even administrative-political autonomy is not restricted to some big metropolises but can be observed also with medium sized and even small urban areas of a few thousand inhabitants.

Nevertheless the shifting of urban planning and policy interest from the core areas to the fringe is not a revolutionary but a normal process following the natural course of urban development.

Although inner-urban development should have first priority for a sustainable development of metropolitan regions, an exclusive orientation towards this goal might contribute to further dispersion and sprawl as a result of limited land supplies within the limits of the central city (Wiegandt 1998).

Depending on the region's morphological conditions that largely determine accessibility and inter-regional connectivity the single community within the suburbanized fringe faces quite different preconditions for its own development. Thus merely from this geographical point of view the urban fringe may reveal a very heterogeneous picture which, to a certain degree, is the outcome also of an individual struggle for communal survival and independence. Thinking locally still dominates over thinking regionally.

Planning boards of the core cities of urbanized regions know about the difficulties and time consuming negotiations with neighbouring communities to install regional or even mutual planning cooperation. With the city of Graz for example it lasted more than 20 years before a binding regional development program for the political district Graz and its surrounding communities (political district Graz-Umgebung) could be set into force in 1996.

3 The regional development program for the Graz metropolitan area

The regional development program is not a component of subordinate legislation but a voluntary agreement to give the region a common future perspective and outline program in order to

- rise general living quality standards,
- secure natural resources, and
- increase the creation of wealth.

Reaching these aims demands a consensus policy among the provincial government of Styria, the metropolitan city of Graz, and all the surrounding communities.

The Graz metropolitan area comprising the city of Graz and the political district Graz-Umgebung plays a substantial role within the whole province of Styria. Hosting approximately 358,000 (2001) inhabitants and offering more than 40% of availability of labour in Styria the region ranks first in the country. Yet, population and economic growth have shown an uneven development.

Whereas the core-city of Graz suffered from a population loss of 4.5% between 1991 and 2001 the surrounding communities of the Graz metropolitan area (pol. district Graz-Umgebung) gained in 11.4% inhabitants. The whole region grew by 5.9% from 355,858 (1991) to 357,952 inhabitants (2001).

There are, however, remarkable differences as to regional growth which, to a large part, results from the district's morphological structure. Whereas the northern part is predominantly hilly and mountainous (Steirisches Randgebirge), the south is characterized by the wide terraces of the river Mur in the Graz basin and by adjacent rolling hills formed by young Tertiary sediments. Thus settlement and urbanization activities concentrate in the southern suburban communities like Hart bei Graz, Raaba, Grambach, Fernitz, Seiersberg, Pirka, etc. with rates of increase between 15% and 28% between the last two censuses. What are the consequences of this development? If the present trends continue the population of the Graz and Graz-Umgebung region will increase to about 374,000 by 2006 bringing the rural-urban fringe a plus of 5,800 inhabitants (+4.3%) and the city of Graz a minus of 3,500 people (-1.5%).

Population changes must not only be evaluated from a mere demographic point of view. They have also an important political, fiscal, economic, and social component not to forget the consequences in reshaping the image of the landscape. This, consequently, leads to the discussion of landscape aesthetics, the protection of historical cultural landscape patterns or, increasingly, settlement structures, also within the rural-urban fringe. This area for much too long seems to have been forgotten by politicians, architects, planners, and the media if one regards the necessity of giving the suburban moloch some kind of overall shape, structure, scale, or identity. Only recently Sieverts (1998), Hesse and Schmitz (1998), Christ (1998), Kaltenbrunner (1998), Hatzfeld und Roters (1998), or Wiegandt (1998) have focused on this problem which to a certain degree results from the fact that competences and legal instruments of regional planning still turn out rather weak in comparison with the power of local planning authorities. Local planning autonomy not only denotes the power of these local authorities (the mayor and the community council) to conduct their own local planning affairs from case to case but also means autonomy in structural planning. So, they may lay down certain principles for land use in the area of their responsibility (zoning or local development plans and urban land use planning) without considering the needs and decisions of neighbouring communities.

Communal autonomy in Austria is a holy cow which is being defended with teeth and claws. The consequences of a regional planning policy which to a high degree is dominated by the realization and expected profits from a selfish community not regionally based policy can be studied best from the number, types and distribution of new shopping malls, super and hyper markets or industrial parks.

In the Graz metropolitan region big shopping centres and super markets with a selling area exceeding 600 m² and a total area of the enterprise of more than 1000 m² concentrate in the southern margins of the city of Graz and the neighbouring community Seiersberg.

In 1988 the Styrian provincial government has published regulations concerning the development of the public utility infrastructure. The basic statements and goals of this regulation can be summarized as follows (Steiermärkische Landesregierung, June 6, 1988):

- There are three categories of shopping centres:
- category I: grocery stores including parking lots,
- category II: non-grocery stores including parking lots,
- category III: special types of category II centres including parking lots selling bulky goods like furniture, motor vehicles, machinery, electrical equipment, building supplies, etc.
- The areal distribution of shopping centres has to guarantee that public supply will not be disturbed.
- Category I shopping centres must be integrated into the business zone of the community.
- Business zones of neighbouring communities must be coordinated to secure their function as central places.
- Outside the central business zone category I centres must be excluded.
- Areal vicinity between category I centres and the local business zone is legally admissible only if
 - 1 – there is no substantial interference with the business zone to be expected,
 - 2 – a functional connection for pedestrians only exists which must not exceed 560 m between the local business zone and the shopping centre.

- In case of more than one shopping centre of category I the minimum distance between the centres has to be 500 m.
- Category II shopping centres can be situated in development zones outside the business zone.
- Precondition for the construction or extension of shopping centres is the existence of a detailed local development plan.

The harsh competition between the big supermarket chains and retailers on the one hand and among the single communities of the suburban zone on the other hand struggling for higher community incomes together with the creation of new jobs is the reason for repeated attempts to circumvent the legal basis. It seems, therefore, that a success in establishing new shopping malls largely depends on the availability of a good planner and an excellent lawyer and not so much on regional planning concepts.

Since Johann Heinrich von Thünen had elaborated his widely discussed spatial model of the inter-relationship between agricultural production and the nearby urban market in the early 1920s almost two centuries have passed. So, how well does this model describe reality at the beginning of a new millennium?

Models are not meant to depict reality but instead to simplify conditions for some specific explanatory purpose such as to describe agro-economic conditions under the influence of central urban markets.

Agriculture in the rural-urban fringe has changed dramatically since the end of World War II as can be seen from huge losses of farmsteads and arable land yet it still plays an important role in urban land use, urban and regional planning policy, ecological development, green structures or zoning planning.

Although the idealized concentric production belts around the central city, if they ever existed in that way, have largely disappeared until today we can find some evidence for their earlier presence. It should be noted that for instance in the case of the Graz metropolitan region the city of Graz (1999 population: 241,000) still hosts 586 (1990) farms although the losses are remarkable: -315 (1999/1990), -720 (1999/1990).

The worldwide globalization process improvement in transportation and durability of fruit, vegetables, fresh meat and dairy products due to new techniques of conservation or genetic manipulation have made food supply of industrialized or tertiary urban societies almost independent from local or regional agriculture. Moreover, home-grown agricultural products today face a heavy competition from foreign even overseas countries which flood the home market all year round with exotic and off-seasonal products at incredibly reasonable prices. Early potatoes from Egypt, salad, cauliflower or cucumbers from Southern Italy, Spain or Turkey, kiwi from New Zealand, Andalusian or Moroccan strawberries, grapes, apricots, peaches and apples from South Africa, Chile or California are frequently being sold cheaper than similar seasonal products from the local market. This may lead to the sometimes curious situation that quality examinations on local agrarian producer markets in the city of Graz have brought to light that clever local farmers had bought foreign fruit and vegetables in the supermarket and made profit at selling them as high-price home or even biological products.

Despite the criminal aspect of such practices this example shows quite well the unsatisfactory situation of farmers notably in the rural-urban fringe.

They have to overcome not only the pressures from the global agrarian market but also from local real estate speculation. The average small-size farm structure in the Graz metropolitan area (around 10 ha) cannot guarantee sufficient income for inevitable operational investments, and a long-term survival of the enterprises. Modernization of farms thus very often can only be financed through selling farm land. Yet, adequate revenue can be expected from the sale of development sites only. Lots fulfilling these demands usually are best arable land at the same time. The Graz case demonstrates this unsatisfactory situation quite obviously. Whereas farmland on the fertile soils of the flat Quaternary terraces of the Graz basin is constantly being pushed back by new development projects these losses can only be compensated by cultivation either of less productive areas within the alluvial flood plain of the river Mur demanding costly drainage operations and input of chemical fertilizers (the latter having led to a dangerous groundwater contamination with serious consequences for the drinking water

supply of the adjoining and parts of the Graz population in the late sixties and seventies of the past century) or on the steep slopes of the adjacent Tertiary ridges being highly inclined to land sliding and soil erosion.

4 Selected fields of planning interest in the rural-urban fringe

4.1 Present regional agriculture

The present economic and societal situation of agriculture in Western European urbanized regions is a rather ambiguous one. On the one hand it may profit from closeness to market, low transportation costs, and the benefits of direct selling to a constantly increasing number of buyers, on the other hand it suffers from potentially high air, water, or soil contamination, extreme pressure on farmland by non-agrarian land users and a regional policy that tends to evaluate farmland primarily as a reserve for urban developing projects. Farmland in the city of Graz comprises of 13,567 ha (1990) in the whole metropolitan region (district Graz-Umgebung: 113,743 ha (1990)).

Agriculture and forestry are still notable open-space consuming factors of urban and suburban land use in the Graz metropolitan region. Yet, there is a significant difference between its northern and southern sections. Due to the different morphological, pedological and climatic structures in the northern mountainous parts of the region animal husbandry, forestry, foraging and mixed cropping dominate agriculture. In the south, on the contrary, on the river terraces of the Mur truck crops for the Graz market prevail besides corn, cereals and pumpkins for the production of pumpkin-seed-oil. Apples, plums and peaches are cultivated on the slopes of the East Styrian Tertiary ridges.

Agriculture in the rural urban fringe of the Graz region undergoes a restructuring process. In 1990 one quarter (25.3%) of a total of 6,367 farms was full time operated but this percentage is shrinking rapidly due to increasing competition from the international market, high investment costs for modern machinery and reaching the high EU quality and sanitary standards of production, falling prices for meat-, milk products and cereals and last but not least due to a very tense situation on the agrarian labour market. So many farmers' children refrain from taking over their parents' farms since, additionally; they often face big difficulties in finding partners willing to share a job on a farm. Only those prepared to accept the challenges of the market either by direct marketing of their own quality products especially from biological production or searching for niches in the market e. g. (horse back riding) will have the probability to survive.

Another future chance for farmers within urbanized areas can be seen in the planning goals of regional policy which attributes agriculture not only a continuation of its traditional role as a producer of food and raw materials (to an increasing number of planners this function of suburban agriculture loses its importance) but an increasing relevance for the maintenance and sustainable development of the cultural landscape offering sufficient green and open space for the recreation of the regional population.

In the recent past a new nationwide phenomenon in cultivating the interrelations between rural and urban socio-cultural environments can be observed. It could be best described by the English term »event« which means a performance following the special leading principle of stimulating as many senses, minds, and inclinations as possible. Through the combination of different kinds of odours, smells, noises, bustles, colours, forms, movements, etc. the participants in the event can let themselves be animated in many ways depending on their various personal characters and individual preferences. Thus, everybody will find something he/she can identify him/herself with which creates a feeling of well-being, relaxation, belonging together. This, exactly, is what the organizers of the event are aiming at when they either want to transport a special message or just stimulate spending money.

In this sense events have turned out an important possibility not only to develop new marketing strategies for urban places or rural areas but also for the promotion of mutual social understanding.

These new urban or rural events go far beyond traditional exhibitions, such as fun fairs, church-, summer-, or fire fighters' festivals and open air performances not only because of their mass-attracting force but also because of a multi cultural background in the broadest sense of the word.

On Sunday, 15th of September 2002 a big event under the title »Aufsteirern« took place in the whole inner city of Graz and animated between 20,000 and 30,000 visitors of all ages, origins and professions together in the roads and places of the town.

Although cultural activities to strengthen the emotional links between urban dwellers and those of the rural and semi-rural hinterlands marked the official background of the event its main goal was establishing and extending economic links between the consumer market of the capital city and the producers not only of agricultural goods within its sphere of influence. So, at the turn of the century we face new forms of relationship between urban and rural spaces that no longer only concentrate either on solely cultural, social, economic, tourist, or political contracts but try to see and market them as an entity. The present visible transformation process of the rural-urban fringe proves the above development impressively.

4.2 Residential development

The ongoing process of restructuring the rural-urban fringe can be observed also in smaller agglomerations like that of Graz. It can be characterized by:

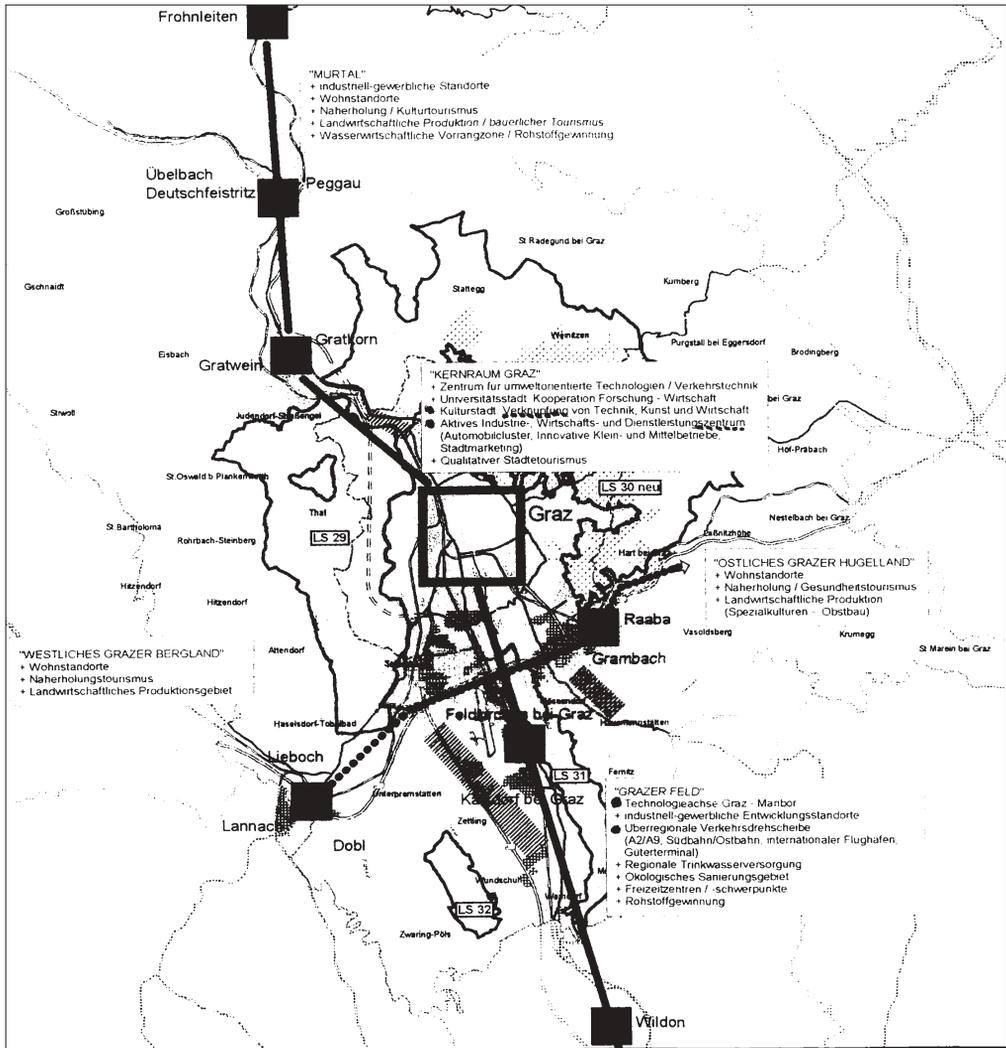
- continuing residential mobility,
- residential differentiation,
- a growing number of commuters not only into the core area but also from the core to the new industrial zones of the fringe,
- new types of retailing and entertainment (mega discotheques, cinema complexes, shopping malls),
- new patterns of areal aggregation of office, service and production spaces,
- new types of private and public housing,
- new public transport facilities (rapid transit),
- new outdoor recreation and leisure facilities.

The industrialization, tertiarisation and quaternisation processes which have been affecting the rural-urban fringe since many decades represent change and economic transformation in the urban landscape. Agriculture and residential land use to some extent may be judged as signs of continuity. It has to be pointed out, however, that widening inequalities within the rural-urban fringe can be observed. Not only does growth in financial services inscribe an increasingly polarized occupational distribution but also do larger-scale internal urban post-industrial shifts express the phenomenon of industrial restructuring and sociocultural change.

These changes are held to be most pronounced in the emergence of a new middle class in North-American cities, and it may be concluded that similar tendencies are also true for the urban landscape of Western Europe.

As a consequence new types of housing and amenities as well as new retail, entertainment, and office spaces are emerging. It can also be noted, as shows not only the example of Graz that these forms of land use and construction have created new essential purposes of planning suburbia (figure 1).

The classical picture of the post-war rural-urban fringe can be described as one of disorder, disharmony, loss of scale and a decreasing demand to general aesthetic aspects. Urban disintegration and a sustainable planned urban development still seem to be incompatible with one another. Yet, the crisis of urban development planning also constitutes a chance. Liberated from the obligation to control everything the largely neglected fringe provides an opportunity to planners, architects, politicians, and even geographers and sociologists to develop new forms and designs for the future (Christ 1998). They include for instance the contourless open spaces of industrial and commercial areas, the open areas in the townscape including fields, pastures and forest residues together with large housing complexes, single family homes and satellite towns.



Generelle Entwicklungsziele der Planungsregion

Quelle: Amt d. Stmk. Landesregierung, Ref. I KT, LRP
Stand: Februar 1999
GIS/Grafik: Hocevar

Entwicklungsachsen / -schwerpunkte

- Kernstadt
- Entwicklungsschwerpunkt
- Hauptentwicklungsachse
- Verbindungssache
- Eisenbahn
- Autobahn

Leitfunktionen

- ▨ Wasserwirtschaft
- ▨ Gewerbe / Industrie
- ▨ Landwirtschaft (Ackerbau)
- ▨ Grüngürtel (Landschaftsschutzgebiete / Grünzüge)

Teilräumliche Gliederung

- ▨ Suburbane Zone (Nahversorgungsbereich Graz)
- ▨ Bauland Gewerbe/Industrie
- ▨ Bauland Wohnen
- Bezirks Grenzen
- Gemeindegrenzen



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Figure 1: General development goals for the planning region Graz/Graz-Umgebung in 1999 (Tischler 1999).

The development of urban hinterlands hitherto has largely been described as a suburbanization process being closely related to the general stage of urban advancement. The fringe directly profited from the urban growth surplus of the core-city. This cascade-like model is no longer true today. The rural-urban fringe has emancipated long since and exhibited increasingly new and independent dynamics of (sub-)urbanism (Siebel 1999).

This present-day urban fringe zone »neither corresponds to our image of the city nor to our longing for an intact landscape« as Karl Ganser, the German geographer and regional planner once formulated.

But is there an alternative and how could it look like? Several attempts have been made so far to develop strategies for bestowing on the hybrid periphery a new kind of aesthetics which is adapted to this problem area and could provide important impulses to modern housing construction and the size and design of industrial complexes, shopping or recreation centres (Kaltenbrunner 1998). Most of them have not been very successful.

The development plan for the planning region Graz/Graz-Umgebung (Tischler 1999) therefore provides for less urban sprawl by reducing the space consuming construction of detached housing and the further development of the public transport system for the benefit of the environment. All relevant statistical data, however, seem to oppose this aim. The number of private cars still rises whereas public transport loses customers and as recent opinion polls confirm far more than two thirds of Austrians prefer to live in a single family home with a garden of their own.

Due to trend analyses concerning population growth the Graz metropolitan region is expected housing requirements figuring around 32,000 new housing units between 1991 and 2006, 52% of which will fall to the share of the rural urban fringe. The planning goal is a reduction of this percentage to 45% by increasing the core city's attractiveness as a place of residence. This could be achieved by creating new meanings for ancient cities, providing pure residential areas with new forms of urban living, the cultivation of traffic and transportation systems in the urbanized region as well as by combining virtual space of the media with real space of the city (Sieverts 1998).

5 New perspectives for the development of urbanized regions

The discourse about sustainable urban development aims at limiting progressive land claims in the urban fringe. Compact and dense forms of housing construction are supposed to counteract further dispersion and urban dissolution. Continuing out-migration into the suburban zone causes significant conflicts between social, economic and ecological claims on urban development.

Today's model of the compact, functionally compound city has replaced that of the functionally differentiated one following the guidelines of the Charta of Athens, creating a form of functional plan-

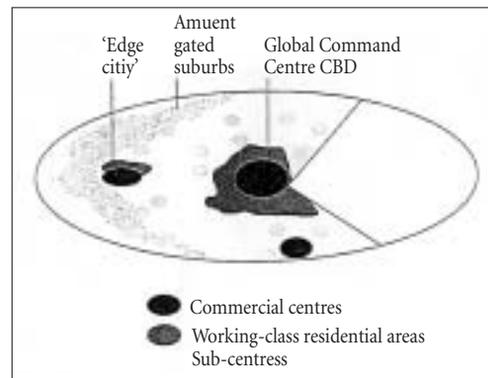


Figure 2: *The post-industrial metropolis* (Graham and Marvin 1996).

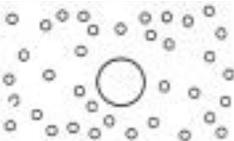
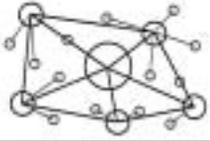
	Settlement structure	Type of interaction
Urbanisation (ca. 1850–1950)		
Suburbanisation (ca. 1950–1980)		
Desuburbanisation (ca. 1980–2000)		
Figure 1: Continuing desuburbanisation (Urban sprawl)		
Figure 2: Reurbanisation (decentralized concentration)		
Figure 3: Sustainable urbanisation		

Figure 3: Scenarios of future settlement structures and types of interaction (Hesse and Schmitz 1998).

ning which was founded on the basic needs of human society like housing, working, consuming, relaxing, moving, learning, living together, etc.

Yet, society has changed and so have its needs since the late twenties of the past century when the Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne developed a special modular grid for the big cities of the world (Moholy-Nagy 1970).

The efficiency of urban functions largely depends on a functioning and economical communication and transportation network. Therefore transportation was given priority in urban planning of the thirties and later on. The consequences of this philosophy have not been overcome yet, although Le Corbusier already in 1938 opposed vehemently the idea that the road network be the overall dominating principle of urban planning. He also demanded from architects to renounce the principle of collective planning in favour of artistic self-understanding and architectonic vision (Braun, Grötz and Schüttemeyer 2001).

So the satellite town after approximately 7000 years of urban development became a new vocabulary in the discussion about the exploding growth of cities in the intermediate period between the World Wars.

The present »post modern urbanization process« underlines quite clearly that economic and social transformations are accompanied by changing standards of behaviour and culture. The post modern or post industrial metropolis symbolizes a polycentric townscape (figure 2).

Residential areas, schools, hospitals, shopping malls and strips, office-, industrial-, and theme or recreation parks co-exist more or less disorganized within the fringe.

This gives scale a completely new dimension. Not only has the vertical section of the buildings altered visibly during the last fifty years adding an increasing number of multi-story and highrise residential and office buildings together with large scale factory installations and ware-houses to the conglomerate of small single family homes and traditional farms but also has »regional scale« changed. Blocks and streets are going to lose their role for spatial orientation on behalf of »growth corridors« stretching out for tens of kilometres. The development of »Edge Cities« in the rural urban fringe covering some 500,000 m² of office space and 60,000 m² of retail space as it is significant for the dynamic changes within US-American urbanized regions did not reach similar dimensions in Europe so far (Hesse and Schmitz 1998). A scenario of future settlement structures and patterns of interaction is shown in figure 3.

Many phenomena of the recent restructuration process of the rural-urban fringe cannot be evaluated properly so far. It is still uncertain whether they represent lasting new trends or actors or simply a new fashion. It is, however, unquestioned, that our understanding of »space« has changed meanwhile considering the three dimensions of space: distance, function and process (Millat 1998).

Brunn (1996) adds a fourth spatial dimension: cognition and identity. Spatial development strategies more and more are relying upon pictures, images and imaginations when discussing regional attractiveness, competitiveness and quality of living.

In this respect »regions« like the rural-urban fringe no longer harmonize with the traditional understanding as a coherent entity but deduce their spatial identity from common interests and identity generating impulses. The Styrian »auto-cluster« around Graz proves this development quite impressively.

The spatial and functional development of the fringe largely depends on its political actors, who in Austria are operating on two levels mainly: the communal and the provincial level. The fact that the local mayor who usually represents the majority party of the community council together with the council is exercising the local planning authority is unsatisfactory in various respects: Politicians generally strive at being re-elected. Thus long term decisions are rather rare since elections every four years demand short-term political success.

The small-scale structure of Austrian suburban communities many of them hosting less than 5,000 sometimes even below 2,000 inhabitants creates a special social climate between the burger and his/her political representatives which may negatively influence communal decisions. Again priority to local needs and development perspectives as compared with such of regional ones is obvious.

The personal composition of the community councils and the occupational status of the mayors, therefore, is still of great importance. Figure 4 and figure 5 give insight into the situation of the Graz agglomeration and recent changes. The dominance of agrarian community representatives despite the low number of farmers among the local populations is striking. Farmers still play an important role in local and regional policy of the rural-urban fringe since they are the owners of much of the land (Zsilincsar 1993).

The rural-urban fringe increasingly functions as a complex entity in the sense of an »externality organism« (Thierstein and Walser 2000). Sustainable urban development today means building up modern global-local connections and relations. The globalization of the economy and information sector changes the labour market, restricts the possibilities of political steering on the local as well as on the national level (as could be seen only recently when Philips closed its plant in Lebring near Graz and dismissed more than 700 employees – a catastrophic situation on the labour market and for the community budget of a small urban fringe commune), fosters the dissolution of the fordistic industrial society

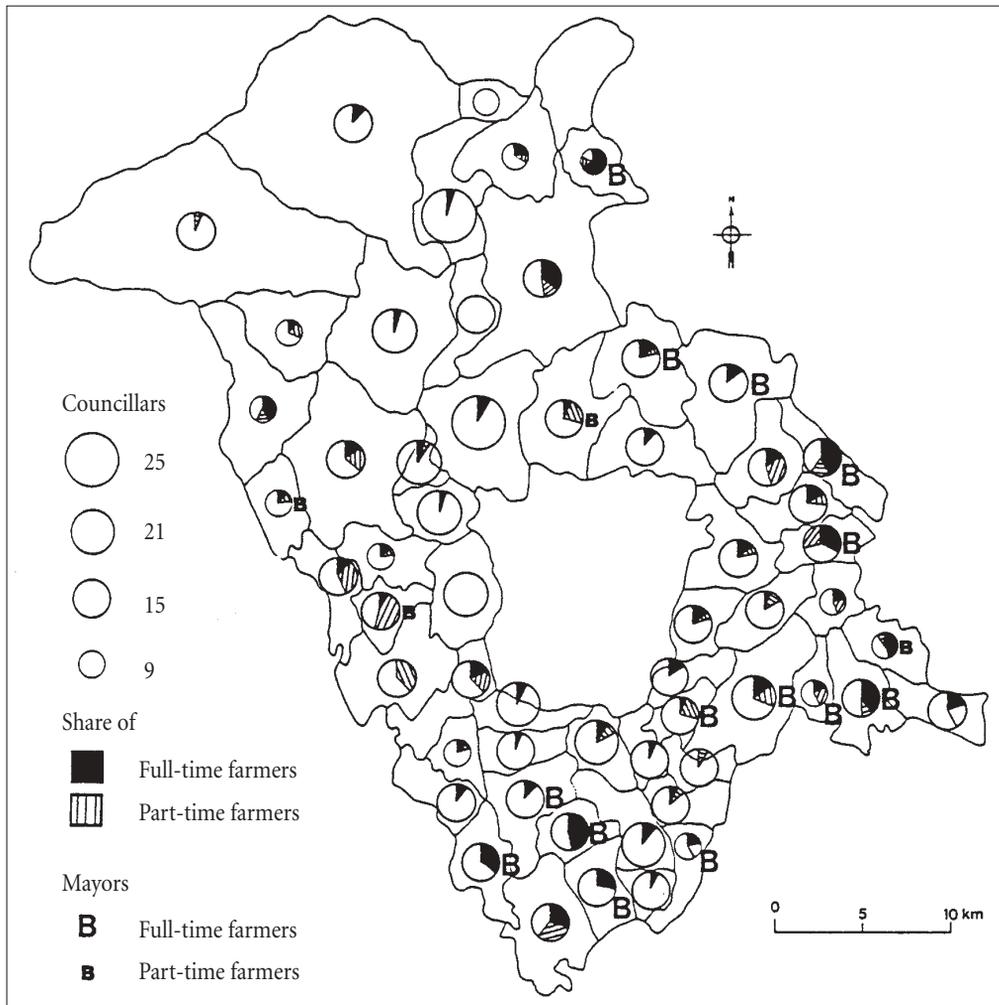


Figure 4: Number of farmers in local councils in 1990 of the Graz rural-urban fringe (Zsilincsar 1993).

and the withdrawing from the lifestyle of a classic fully employed society. Life-long occupational security, reduced spatial and professional mobility are just a remnant of the past. New forms of labour have developed: job switching, job sharing, trivial occupation, etc.

The society of the rural-urban fringe of Central and Western European smaller agglomerations no longer can be characterized by the simple contrast between urban and non-urban. Not only has the autochthonic society passed through deep-reaching changes as mentioned above, it has been additionally enriched or should we say complicated by allochthonic elements, such as guest workers, political, religious or economic refugees increasingly from outside the European culture realm. Their presence is no longer confined to blight or low standard inner-urban residential areas but also spills the rural-urban fringe. The growing number of new commercial or gastronomic establishments mainly owned or run by Asians, sometimes Africans proves this development which, unfortunately may initiate a process of aggravating social, cultural, ethnic and religious tensions.

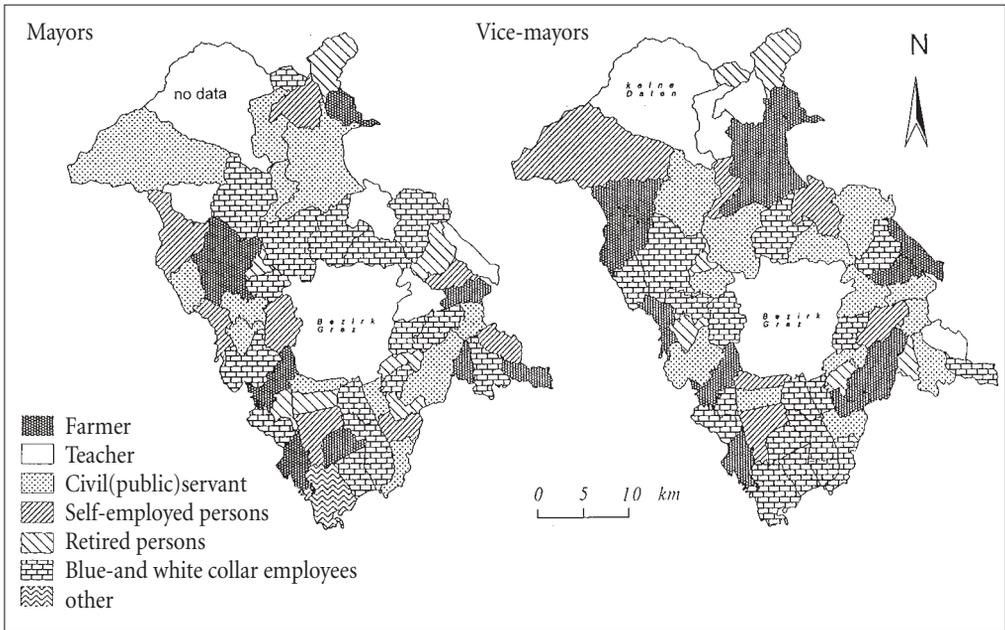


Figure 5: Profession of mayors and vice-mayors in local councils in 2001 of the Graz rural-urban fringe (own collection of data, cartography: Deutscher and Müller).

This makes the rural-urban fringe not only one of the most dynamic cultural landscapes of the presence it, furthermore, gives the term »cultural« an additional »multi-cultural« aspect. (The qualitative evaluation of this process is up to every single person.)

6 The landscape of the rural-urban fringe

The landscape of the rural-urban fringe until recently has not been a topic of special preference to architects, planners, geographers or sociologists although the population that lives in low density suburban environments and largely depends on private cars is growing constantly. The regulated development of the urban fringe needs to take into consideration the ecological and social function of its surrounding landscape. Environmental and planning policies should contribute to an orderly arrangement of the various settlement structures of the fringe and to the consolidation of disorder. Clear confines should be strived for wherever possible (Bundesministerium für Raumordnung, Bauwesen und Städtebau 1996).

The appearance of the rural-urban fringe emphasizes the dichotomy between continuity and change. We realize spatial realities that are remarkably consistent like the traditional road network or farmland fragmentation and can easily be detected in the present suburban residential structure. This is especially true also of form and function of ancient building substance. Many old farmsteads have preserved their forms in spite of having changed their former function as e. g. stables or barns to garages, workshops, warehouses or flats. Until the first half of the past century the rural-urban fringe reconciles the image of a largely uniform area as to its predominant forms, scales and functions.

Important impulses for a noticeable and lasting restructuring of the fringe have been initiated mainly by the improvement of the regional and national communications network (advanced road and

highway system). Highway intersections become focal points for the construction of shopping centres and enterprises dependent on good traffic links and accessibility together with ample space.

One must also point to widening inequalities between the core area and the suburban zone of cities which has not only affected residential but increasingly commercial and service structures namely in the entertainment and leisure sector.

The rural-urban fringe represents a very specific type of our cultural landscape which has been described in manifold ways as non-urban, non-rural, inter-urban, etc, yet a clear general definition has not been found until now, and probably, will hardly be found. Too big, too different, too specific, and sometimes, too unique are the various parameters which conditioned the development of every single one of these landscapes. But of course there are some general features and a noticeable switch in trends to be observed:

- Retreat of agriculture from the area leaving back highly specialized and productive »agric-islands« within built-up zones.
- Since agriculturally dominated landscapes and privately owned forest lots in the fringe also function as recreation areas for the urban population and according to the areal closeness between suburban farmland and suburban residential units conflicts between the various land users are increasing.
- The growing number of shopping centres, business – and industrial parks and of leisure facilities (multiplex cinemas, sports stadiums, out- and indoor recreation sites, etc.) produces increasing traffic with all its consequences (noise, jams, air pollution, accidents, high costs for road conservation).
- Shortage of urban development zones leads to a constant rise of land prices which many of the private builders of detached houses no longer can afford. Thus open space is increasingly being sold to big house building agencies that make profit from multi-storey residential developments. That again creates conflict with the neighbouring population living in family residences.

The spheres of consequence which result from (sub-)urban growth reach far beyond the areas directly affected. Linear infrastructures (roads, railway tracks, electric power supply) cause the fragmentation of landscapes and the isolation of biotopes. Despite the fact of the seemingly inevitable further destruction of the landscape of the rural urban fringe we must face the following consequences challenging future development and environmental policy (Losch 1999, 316):

- The agrarian population of the rural-urban fringe will continually decrease and thus bring pressure to the labour market.
- Together with the retrogression of the primary sector not only a loss of cultural and regional identity must be expected but, furthermore, a loss of traditional cultural landscapes.
- Environmental stress and destruction are expected to increase.
- Traditional, »fossil« cultural landscapes (Gunzelmann 1987) no longer comply with the demands of present and future users of the rural-urban fringe.
- The present image of the rural-urban fringe is that of over-fragmentation due to urban sprawl wiping away historically grown settlement structures and field patterns which leads to the impoverishment of species and aesthetic levelling of landscapes.
- The loss of typical elements and structures within rural-urban landscapes reduces the possibilities for the formation of an own regional and regional-historic identity which might underline its specific position as a transition type of landscape mediating between urban and rural structures (Stiens 1999, 332).

To cope with the demands for the future development of the rural-urban fringe regional planning authorities should strengthen interdisciplinarity. Models of spatial interaction should include aesthetic aspects as well. Regional development concepts should not only concentrate on infrastructure, possible or desirable economic uses, or accommodation requirements but also on the needs of nature protection and if necessary, the preservation of valuable cultural landscapes to guarantee a creative a sustainable future advancement.

7 Conclusions

Urban development at the dawn of a new millennium is characterized by fading structural boundaries and the outward shifting of urban gravitational centres incorporating a growing area of rural landscapes. Population growth and distribution as well as building activities are becoming increasingly dispersed. The out-migration of inhabitants from the urban core areas is accompanied by the suburbanization of employment. The development of the productive sector is shifting towards the rural-urban fringe which, in the meantime, has become a destination of tertiary uses mainly for the communication, entertainment or business administration sectors. The expansion of activity ranges of firms also led to an increased out-migration of especially customer-oriented services to fringe areas.

New impulses come from the rapidly growing market of the leisure sector (urban entertainment centres, multiplex cinemas, leisure parks, fun and adventure baths, etc.).

Urban planning largely reacts positively to the new large-scale facilities although growing inter-communal competition as to the location of such enterprises can be observed. Thus reasonable solutions for suburban traffic and zoning plans turn out more and more difficult. The same is true to the inflation of new suburban shopping malls, business and industrial parks. The implementation of mixed land uses is proving complicated in the urban fringe due to the disposal of sufficient development zones at reasonable financial conditions.

Agriculture once the predominant space consuming and economic factor within the rural-urban fringe has largely lost this position and today mainly functions as reserve potential for future urban expansion.

The social trends towards dispersed and isolated structures supported by the general globalization process very often cause the loss of urban development quality namely that of scale. Aesthetic demands frequently are being pushed into the background. The growing dissolution of the urban society meanwhile has laid hold also of the urban fringe society. Altogether, new forms of urbanization are becoming visible. The traditional polarization between core and periphery loses its importance. Growth and interne structure of the post-modern and post-industrial metropolis demand a new evaluation of its fringe area.

It is a big challenge for urbanists, architects, regional planners, sociologists, geographers and many more to find adequate solutions for its future development.

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9 Povzetek: Obmestje: aktualni problemi in bodoče perspektive

(prevedla Mimi Urbanc)

Za urbani razvoj na prehodu v novo tisočletje je značilno brisanje strukturnih mej in širjenje gravitacijskih območij mest na kmetijske površine. Osnovne značilnosti, povezane z mestnim prebivalstvom, so njegovo naraščanje, razpršena poselitve in razpršena gradnja. Izseljavanje ljudi iz mestnih središč je povezano s »suburbanizacijo zaposlovanja«. Proizvodne dejavnosti se selijo v obmestje (mestno obrobje), ki pa je medtem že postalo terciarizirano, saj so se tu naselile prometne, zabaviščne in poslovno-administrativne dejavnosti. Širjenje mreže dejavnosti je iz mestnih središč pritegnilo uslužnostne dejavnosti. Dodatno spodbudo predstavlja hitro rastoča zabavišna dejavnost (mestna zabavišna središča, multikinodvorane in podobno).

Urbanistično planiranje se je na rast novih velikopoteznih objektov odzvalo pozitivno, opazimo pa lahko tekmovanje med gospodarskimi in poslovnimi združenji za ustrezne lokacije, zato so smotrne rešitve za ureditev obmestnega prometa in za določitev ustrezne namenske rabe vse zahtevnejše. Enako velja tudi za vse številnejša suburbana nakupovalna središča, poslovne in industrijske parke. Uresničevanje in zagotavljanje mešane rabe prostora v obmestju je zato zahtevno, še posebej, ker povpraševanje presega ponudbo ustreznih površin in zaradi močnega pritiska kapitala.

Kmetijstvo, ki je bilo glavni porabnik obmestnega prostora in pomemben ekonomski dejavnik, je izgubilo vodilno vlogo. Danes kmetijske površine pomenijo le še prostorsko možnost za nadaljnje širjenje mest in mestnih dejavnosti.

Globalizacijski procesi narekujejo družbene trende, ki gredo v smeri razpršene in individualne naselitve, kar običajno vodi v poslabšanje urbanega razvoja. Estetski standardi so pogosto porinjeni v ozadje. Razkroj urbane družbe se je prenesel tudi na obmestno družbo. Vse to vpliva na oblikovanje novih vidnih oblik urbanizacije. Tradicionalna dvojnost med središčem in obrobjem je izgubila svoj pomen. Rast

in razvoj notranje strukture postmoderne in postindustrijske metropole zahteva nov razvoj obmestnih območij. Ustrezne rešitve prihodnjega razvoja so zato velik izziv urbanistom, arhitektom, regionalnih načrtovalcem, sociologom, geografom in mnogim drugim.

Splošne ugotovitve so prikazane na primeru Graškega metropolitanskega območja, ki obsega dva politična okraja: mesto Gradec (*Graz*) in okolico Gradca (*Graz-Umgebung*). Njegov pomen sega prek meja okrajev. V nasprotju z mestom, ki je v zadnjem desetletju prejšnjega stoletja zabeležil upad števila prebivalcev, pa so obmestne skupnosti povečale število prebivalcev. Ta trend je povezan z hitro rastjo obmestnih nakupovalnih središč, ki so se osredotočila zlasti na južnem obrobju mesta.