

SUSTAINABLE VILLAGES AND GREEN LANDSCAPES IN THE ‘NEW URBAN WORLD’



Editors:

Peter Nijkamp

Karima Kourtit

Adriana Kocornik-Mina



AXEL AND MARGARET
AX:SON JOHNSON FOUNDATION

JADS Jheronimus
Academy
of Data Science

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Editors:

Peter Nijkamp

JADS (Jheronimus Academy of Data Science),

's-Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands

Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, Romania

Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland

Karima Kourtiti

JADS (Jheronimus Academy of Data Science),

's-Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands

Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, Romania

Center for the Future of Places (CFP), KTH Stockholm, Sweden

Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden

Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland

Adriana Kocornik-Mina

Global Alliance for Banking on Values, Zeist, The Netherlands

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Tel.: 043 - 3500424
info@shaker.nl
www.shaker.nl

Preface

The ‘*New Urban World*’ marks the beginning of a new epoch in human history, in which ongoing urbanisation at a world-wide scale determines largely the settlement geography of our world. Features of this emerging ‘*urban century*’ are:

- rise in the number of cities and mega-cities.
- structural population increase in most cities to the detriment of rural areas.

Thus, the megatrend in the ‘*New Urban World*’ is: more and larger cities! Consequently, modern cities tend to increase their political, cultural, technological and socio-economic power, especially if large cities form (trans-border) alliances as part of a global network. Consequently, the precise demarcation of cities or urban areas in a mobile world becomes increasingly fuzzy.

The strengthening of the position of cities and metropolitan areas prompts immediately a complementary question, viz. on the position of non-urban (or rural) areas. Such areas – by far the largest share of the surface of our earth – are also subjected to significant and structural changes:

- a tendency towards a decline in rural population and in the volume and variety of amenities in rural towns.
- a permanent threat to the loss of an authentic rural character and rural sustainability caused by pervasive urbanisation and transportation developments.

Thus, the megatrend here is: weaker and vulnerable rural areas! While in the ‘*New Urban World*’ we observe a dominant interest in urbanity, we witness a declining interest in rurality. Therefore, there is clearly a well-grounded need for a thorough scientific reflection on the future of rural areas.

To address these questions, an international expert workshop (in August 2017) was held in the beautiful village of Dalfsen, an authentic rural place located in the Vecht Valley in the Easter part of the Netherlands. This meeting, called an Advanced Brainstorm Carrefour (ABC), was organized by *The Regional Science Academy (TRSA)* and supported by the Municipality of Dalfsen. The aims and scope of this ABC were:

- to map out the complex force field of rurality versus urbanity.
- to highlight the advantages of sustainable rural development (e.g., nature tourism, arts development).
- to map out the benefits of human health and social capital in rural towns and areas.
- to show evidence-based research findings from all over the world so as to provide cornerstones for a future view on rurality in an urbanized world.
- to trace small-scale promising perspectives for rural towns and villages based on a sense of community and self-identity.
- to identify strategies for a reinforcement of rural areas in the jetstream of continuous urbanisation, for instance, regarding education, retailing or recreation.
- to develop new perspectives on mutually supportive developments of rural and urban areas, based on complementary lifestyles, cultures, and ecological needs.
- to suggest new research departures for a sustainable and vital development of rural towns.
- to draw lessons from world-wide experiences and to test their applicability in traditional green villages (like Dalfsen in the Netherlands).

The present volume offers a selection of various contributions and findings from this workshop. We thank the Municipality of Dalfsen for their hospitality in hosting this meeting, which took place in an authentic rural environment. This ABC

demonstrated clearly that rural areas are by no means ‘islands of decay’. On the contrary, they may be seen as signposts for sustainable development in an urbanised world. Finally, we also thank Peter Elmlund (Ax: son Johnson Foundation, Sweden) for his uninterrupted and constructive interest and support for new activities regarding a better understanding of the ‘*New Urban World*’.

Peter Nijkamp
Karima Kourtit
Adriana Kocornik-Mina

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