

## **RURBANIZATION IN THE REGIONAL PERIPHERY OF CENTRAL MEXICO**

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### **Summary**

In many developed countries urban sprawl leads to the complete absorption of the surrounding rural areas and the transformation of “rural life”. This is particularly true of the periurban zone of the most dynamic cities. This has been conceptualized as the “*new rurality*” or “*rurbanization*” that is replacing the previous center-periphery model of development and describes a new global order which is leading to the spatial forms that are characterized by *homogeneity* and *diversity*.

This paper summarizes the phenomenon in Mexico’s Central Region. It is hard to identify rurbanization in this region due to the shortage of appropriate data, but it is possible to assert its emergence, particularly within the outer city belt, and in Mexico City’s nearby corridors.

### **1. Rurbanization Examined**

Some of the theoretical models and frameworks used to describe the organizational forms and functions of non urban areas have been questioned as they do not adequately describe rural transformations and changes and the relationship between the city and rural areas. Problems arise when describing the increased mobility between urban and rural areas and the rise in the number of journeys of both people and goods; the dislocation of some economic activities and the new specialized uses of rural areas, e.g.

tourism, parks and development zones; the creation of new social networks in rural areas and the general non-rural uses of rural areas. These multiple problems are giving rise to new perspectives on rural areas.

In order to put the discussion into context we are presenting a brief review of the types of analysis that have been used to describe the relationship between cities and their rural hinterlands and rural settlements. There are two main types of perspectives. The first examines the relationship from the sociological and cultural points of view and the second uses spatial models to describe the dynamic between urban and regional areas and the urban periphery. Sometimes the concepts and methods overlap and their limits are not clear; however, the classification used in the review is a useful background for our own work.

Redfield proposed the first model to describe urban-rural relations based on a polar opposite approach through the idea of a folk-urban continuum. The different settlements on the continuum conform to urban social and cultural characteristics to a greater or lesser extent. This macro approach, however, has not been applied to the spatial forms adopted by recent rural processes. N. Long (1996) suggests replacing the traditional spatial and sociocultural approaches with the concept of the "new rurality", in order to replace terms based on the center-periphery model for those that address both the homogeneous and diverse forms that are emerging with the new global order (see Table 1).

New rurality therefore redefines a number of factors that have already been identified with regard to traditional rural processes, e.g. lower population densities, dispersed settlements and the dominance of primary sector economic activities (particularly agriculture). In developing countries rurality is frequently associated with a cultural and political heritage that is characterized by social solidarity and collective labor practices. New rurality breaks with this perception of unchanging relationships and focuses on the way change takes place in the rural zones that surround large metropolises.

Despite Long's compelling rejection of earlier spatial concepts we still have to examine the degree to which the center-periphery model is obsolete for describing the new rurality and our research through the literature has uncovered very little work in this issue.

At present no adequate theoretical framework exists to describe these changes and a spatial model needs to be developed that incorporates the changes that have been taking place in agriculture. Rurbanization is a complex process that cannot be understood through the concept of the center-periphery model. Some important contributions to understanding the process have been made through utilizing the concepts developed in the social sciences, e.g. sociology and anthropology. These inevitably have a spatial framework of analysis and have enriched geographical perspectives; however, none of them constitutes a spatial model that can explain rural change.

One perspective that has made some progress deals with the new productive relations that underpin the new social framework. The perspective has been called the *new*

*rusticity* by some authors and focuses mainly on the diversification of rural productive activities and takes economic organization as its starting point. It has been observed that in some traditionally rural areas the economy is becoming more specialized in secondary and tertiary activities. This economic process has an impact on cultural practices as well as having spatial consequences in terms of the use of time, the organization and structure of work, residential areas, migration and immigration (Ramirez and Arias, 2002). The concept of new rusticity allows for the development of descriptive work and can be used to highlight particular aspects of rural change; however, it cannot be considered as a theoretical model for understanding the relationship between periurban, rural and urban areas.

Recent work by the anthropologist Pepin Lehalleur (1997) states that the diversity of social actors is key to understanding the mechanisms by which relocation takes place in the context of globalization. These actors produce new cultural and social models which are termed the "rural comarca", "little town", "village" or "small city". These commonly have a strong regional central place that shapes the distinctive qualities of each *relocation* process. Probably the most innovative concept to describe the regional central places is "*agrocit*" which is generally a small or medium sized city that combines normal urban functions with the existence of a successful agrarian periphery.

Other authors seek to understand rural economies by using the concept of social competition. This refers to the influence of economic and social relations in particular territories, including international work processes such as flexibility; new forms of trade and commerce; and, the presence of local resources such as natural resources, infrastructure, the local social and political system and the structure of production, the labor market and finally, technology. The spatial dimension of social competition can only be understood at the regional level and therefore rural change has to be seen in a broad context that involves complex linkages with demographic and economic processes and institutional factors.

One such concept is flexibility, which is particularly relevant for explaining new forms of industrial production and characterizing the relationship between space and productive activities. It was developed by Benko and Lipietz of the French Regulation School and originally did not include agricultural production. The fragmentation of territories according to types of production is due to industrial and technological processes in wider, historical, cycles. Space is the result of forms of work organization or "regulation modes". In the model economic organization, the use of resources and its institutional and informal components are the determining factors for the emergence of a particular spatial structure.

In this sense the range of phenomena associated with city-country relations is complex. In many developed countries urban sprawl affects rural areas to the extent that agrarian activity is no longer the most important characteristic of "rural life" and this is particularly the case in the periurban area of the most dynamic cities.

This phenomenon highlights the limitations of the traditional model that has been used to explain the rural-urban relationship: the center-periphery model. This was first

developed by the geographer Von Thünen, himself from a farming background, and postulates an “ideal type” of five concentric rings around a centrally positioned city. These are to provide the main agricultural products for the city population, which is their “natural” market. The ring nearest the city is for intensive agriculture and dairy products, the second ring is for forest products, the third ring is for extensive field crops, and the fourth ring is for ranching and extensive livestock. Finally, the fifth ring would be unproductive wasteland.

Von Thünen’s model is based on the spatial relationship between agrarian activities and the city and does not involve the social processes that are key to understanding the changing landscape of the new rurality. It is clear that traditional frameworks based on center-periphery are inadequate and new concepts are required to describe a new phenomenon.

The stages of the urban development model are somewhat different and represent a more elaborate version of the centre-periphery model. Here the focus is on the internal process of urbanization which cannot be reduced to the physical expansion of the urban areas or the increase in particular life styles and the behavior patterns that have been classified as urban. The model sees cities as entities and attempts to explain their continual movement. It is the urban spatial dynamic model that includes periurban areas which are found on the limits of urban areas. The model has four phases:

1. Urbanization
2. Suburbanization (intra regional deconcentration and the construction of nearby periurban areas)
3. Deurbanization (extra regional deconcentration and the construction of periurban areas far from the urban core)
4. Reurbanization (mainly by gentrification).

As far as categorizing rural areas is concerned, and their relation with urban areas, Garcia Bartolome (1996) cites two typologies for rural spaces, one from the Communauté Economique Européene (CEE) and the other from the Organization for Economic and Co-operation Development (OECD). Concepts from traditional regional science still play the main role in both documents. The former defines three types of rural space: "central", "peripheral" (divided into favorable or unfavorable areas according to the economic environment), and "high mountain rural areas". The latter formulation defines any region as rural that has population densities lower than 150 inhabitants per hectare. In addition regions can be "predominantly" or "significantly rural" according to the proportion of towns and villages with rural densities which is defined as more than 50% or between 25-50% of towns and villages with rural densities respectively. The OECD also includes the other extreme on the population density spectrum which is the "predominant urbanized areas".

The most promising interpretation of these processes is made by Jean Steinberg (1993) who analyzes the metropolises of industrialized countries. Those with historic patterns of urban growth have three urban belts around the urban core: the periphery, or the old villages (fauburges), the banlieue and the periurban zone. The first type of urban growth

corresponds to the so-called fauburgs or fauxbourgs which are the old peripheral villages and industrial areas of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The *fauburgs* are literally “false cities” for the population that was rejected from the mediaeval or “true city” or *burg* which was usually fortified by walls. Next to the *fauburgs* lie the *banlieues pavillonnaires*. The *banlieue* was also a mediaeval institution for areas of urban land under the jurisdiction of a landlord. In France these large stretches of land were built upon between the 1920s and 1960s with low-income rental housing and represent an important link in the continuous urban agglomeration of the main metropolis. The extensive periurban areas are found beyond both the *fauburgs* and the *banlieues*. The periurban area is mostly residential and can be characterized by the mutual penetration of urban and rural spaces. Steinberg points to the following six factors as the causes for this phenomenon: 1) high population growth rates; 2) rural migration; 3) the impact of the automobile; 4) intraurban migration from the centre to the periphery; 5) planned urban growth poles on the periphery, e.g. new towns, commercial shopping centers, universities or technology parks; and 6) tourist and recreational sites.

The concept of “periurban spaces” has particular relevance for areas of rural-urban transition that are linked to the metropolis. Periurbanization refers to the emergence and consolidation of an urban-rural fringe. It involves changes in land use due to new housing and the relocation of economic activities, and also new transport and communication configurations. Periurban spaces (called suburban or exurban in the American tradition) have been analyzed using the concept of belts or rings. Periurban spaces do not necessarily form part of a continuous urban area as they can be fragmentary or discontinuous. This is not the case with conurban spaces which are always part of the continuous extension of an urban area.

Sometimes the population living in the villages on the periphery continues to work in the city center. From a spatial point of view the villages are rural and Bauer and Roux call this “rurbanization” or the “scattered city”. They used the concept “*ville éparpillée*”, which is ironic as the most important characteristic of a city is socioeconomic and physical concentration.

The process of rurbanization in France has been identified as involving peripheral urban spaces and also the emergence of typical urban forms in rural zones far away from the city. In this formulation “rurban” space is just one type of periurban space with its own particular characteristics. These include new forms of habitat, the use of agricultural land for urban purposes, and the development of typical urban forms in rural areas that are far from traditional industrial and residential zones. The rurbanization process takes place within transitional areas between the fully urban and the fully rural and it is important to mention that not all transitional areas develop the rurbanization phenomena, but might just remain as part of the larger conurbation (see Table 2).

New rurality has to be understood as a political, institutional, social and cultural process that involves a particular set of actors in the context of globalization and also in the context of specific new localizations. Delgado (2002) argues that the concept of new rurality is useful in a restricted spatial sense and is associated with “rururban” spaces.

To put it another way, periurban spaces are generic territories that surround large cities. They may or may not lead to rurbanization processes. Rurbanization is often called “the urban field” in North America and may include rural areas. The links between the different areas are highly complex and may include urban recreation facilities such as parks and golf courses, and transport facilities such as motorways and airports, and, finally, low density industries and warehousing activities.

In Mexico the persistence of rurality alongside the socio-spatial restructuring of the urban system is quite evident. In this sense Mexico seems to resemble France more than urbanized America. Rurbanization is also a socio-spatial consequence of neoliberalism where peasant women migrate from *ejido* agricultural communities located within the periurban belt to work in the agrofood industries in nearby urban corridors. At the same time peasant agriculture has changed from being based on traditional subsistence grains to commercial crops and horticulture. In addition the property system is changing toward private ownership as the *ejido* social land is leased and/or sold.

To sum up, Von Thunen’s center-periphery model and Redfield’s folk-urban continuum model mark the beginning of the two main tendencies for the analysis of the urban-rural relationship and each coincides with a particular field of study: on the one hand studies are based on spatial characteristics, and, on the other, studies emphasize social and cultural characteristics. Each perspective is a synthesis of the respective characteristics to a greater or lesser extent.

<b>Model / theory</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Folk-urban continuum	Redfield	Settlements are classified by the presence or absence of cultural features associated with urban life. Redfield uses a continuous and increasing scale to classify them.
New rurality	Long (1996)	New rurality is the redefinition of the traditional features used to define rurality, like low population density, dispersion and primary economic activities.
		New rurality focuses in practices and relations established among social actors. These social actors produce new cultural and social models that are spatially reorganized by a <i>relocation</i> process.  Relocation is the change of local forms of organization and knowledge because the globalization. The most important process of relocation is competitiveness in rural areas.
New Rusticity	Ramirez and Arias (2002)	New Rusticity analyzes cultural and social changes based on the economic and labor patterns change, through social actors’ theories.

Table 1. Sociological and cultural analysis of rurality, rural-urban relations and rural change

Model / theory	Authors	Definition
Center-periphery model	Von Thünen	Concentric model of market areas, defined by this agricultural and cattle-raising production.
Stages of urban development model	Champion (2001)	It consists of four phases: urbanization, suburbanization (near periurban), desurbanization (far periurban) and reurbanization.
Rural space typologies	Garcia Bartolome (1996)	Garcia Bartolome quotes two typologies for rural spaces, one from the Communauté Economique Européene (CEE) that defines three types of rural space: "central", "peripheral" and "high mountain rural areas".
		The second typology is from the Organization for Economic and Co-operation Development (OECD) that defines any region as rural with a population density lower than 150 inhabitants per hectare.
Periurbanization as historic patterns of urban growth	Jean Steinberg (1993)	Periurban spaces are generic territories around the largest cities, but not necessary continuous physically. Periurban spaces have been analyzed through crowns or belts.
		This model distinguishes three urban belts around the urban core: the periphery, or the old villages ( <i>fauburgs</i> ), the <i>banlieue</i> and the periurban zone.
Rurbanization	Bauer and Roux (1975)	Rurbanization is the diffusion of urban activities and population in rural spaces around the metropolis. Rurbanization includes a valuation of the landscape and the quality of human habitat.
		Rurban spaces could be analyzed by the concept of new rurality in a restricted spatial sense. New rurality has to be understood as a political, institutional, social and cultural process in rururban context.

Table 2. Spatial analysis of rurality, rural-urban relations and rural change

As can be seen above, the concept of rurbanization is just one of many concepts that came out of recent debates on the relationship between rural and urban areas and the city and its hinterland; however, it is the only concept that focuses on the spatial characteristics of this changing relationship.

The sociological and anthropological approaches outlined above underestimate the theoretical implications of these spatial processes. In general these approaches look to the social, cultural and economic elements to the changes in rural-urban relations and although they touch on the spatial consequences of change in an indirect way they are not at the center of their academic field of interest. For this reason we reject the concepts of “new rurality”, “rusticity” and “relocation” in the regional periphery of Central Mexico, and are instead using the concept of “rurbanization.” This puts the relationship in a spatial context and can therefore aid our understanding of the transformation of large city environs and their multiple kinds of transitional spaces.

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### **Biographical Sketches**

**Javier Delgado** is a Researcher at the Institute of Geography, at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Originally trained as an Architect he came into the field of Geography through the analysis of spaces. His main interest is related to the Rural-Urban relationship, the importance of which seems to be increasing in countries like Mexico, where many social problems emerge as the country becomes urbanized without an equivalent socioeconomic development. He also leads a Seminar on The City-Region Relationship and a course on The Management of Urban and Rural Spaces in the Program of Master and Doctor Degree in Geography at the UNAM.

**Naxhelli Ruiz** is a Cultural Anthropologist through the National School of Anthropology and History (ENAH) and Master in Regional Studies through the Institute Jose Maria Mora. Her work has been in the field of cultural and social change in rural areas in the state of Queretaro, in Central Mexico. Her main interest is the study of activities like migration, tertiary specialization in rural areas and tourism, which result in new forms of rurality and new social actors in spaces customarily defined only by their agrarian activities and their traditional cultural expressions. She is also developing a project about theory, methodology and models of regional analysis applied in Anthropology.