Chapter 15

New Concepts and Instruments for the Urban–Rural Continuum: Exploring Through Education

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ABSTRACT

The chapter presents and discusses the process and results of collaboration between an academic institution and local government in students’ masters’ theses and integrated urban development projects for urban-rural continuum of the territory of the City of Pančevo, Serbia. The chapter has four main parts: 1) a brief overview of the theoretical framework for multilevel governance; 2) the background, focusing on the national policy; 3) applied educational model; and 4) 11 students’ projects dealing with the urban-rural continuum. Recommendations are made for continuing application of and research into potential teaching methods that promote meaningful interaction and practical and problem-oriented instruction that contribute to an understanding of contemporary problems of balanced urban-rural development. The conclusion discusses process and product outcomes, differentiating benefits for all those involved, as well as the obstacles and challenges encountered.

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INTRODUCTION

In Europe’s complex and rapidly evolving development context, characterised amongst other things by threats to the vitality of rural areas, as well as by urban sprawl and declining quality of life in urban areas due to congestion and pollution, the interdependencies between city and country have become a particularly important topic in key EU development policies.

The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (EC, 1999), as an indicator of the ‘policy of concern’ for the future of rural areas throughout Europe, was an early instrument of ‘urban-rural partnership’. This is a concept applicable to both rural communities and areas blighted by uncontrolled urban sprawl, and its key tenets are the provision of basic public services and public transportation in rural areas; fostering partnership between cities and rural settlements and creation of ‘functional regions’; integration of rural zones into urban areas’ spatial development strategies; encouragement of and support for co-operation between rural areas, as well as between these and small and medium-sized towns (at both the national and international levels), to implement projects and exchange experiences; and establishment of networks between public institutions, small and medium-sized businesses, and local communities in both urban and rural areas. Urban-rural connections are referenced as strategic aspects in both the Urban Agenda for the EU (2016) and the New UN-Habitat Urban Agenda (2016). These international policies promote sustainable patterns of urbanization, including adequate living standards, economic growth, environmental protection, and a balanced system of urban and rural communities. They also emphasise decentralisation and a more active role of local governments in an inclusive society where the entire population ought to have access to basic services. Goal 11, as one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals that together make the United Nations Agenda 2030, refers to cities that need to be sustainable, inclusive, safe and responsive. Within goal 11, sub-goal 11a is also defined, which refers to the support of linkages between urban, peripheral and rural areas.

The concept of a spatial and functional relationship between urban and rural areas is based on the movement of people, capital, goods, information, and technology, and the interdependencies of these factors can be examined by means of sociology, economics, geography, and spatial planning (Davoudi & Stead, 2002; Zonneveld & Stead, 2007). According to Davoudi & Stead (2002), urban-rural relationships must be viewed in the context of overall globalisation trends (production, finance, trade, and labour markets), whereby there has to be a shift away from the conventional view of rural areas as exclusively agricultural. Urban-rural linkages are a key segment of territorial development policies exactly because of their major potential to advance the quality of life for both urban and rural populations. These trends are all the more pronounced in post-socialist social and economic transition, and as such this approach should be viewed in relation to the complexity of the local context (Milovanović, Čolić & Maruna, 2017).

The sustainability of urban and rural areas is based on alignment and synergy of their individual development paths that are based on their distinct resources, potentials, and development constraints. In the context of spatial planning and programming, the urban-rural relationship can be made more sustainable through better co-ordination of transportation, land use, and open space planning; limiting growth and increasing the density of existing settlements based on the principles of a green and compact city; constructing blue and green infrastructure; safeguarding agricultural land; and promoting domestic production and the locally-based economy (Nilsson et al., 2014).