

URBAN-RURAL PARTNERSHIP – A MATTER OF TERRITORIAL JUSTICE AND STATE OF MIND

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I.

Dear Colleagues, the topic of urban-rural partnership is seemingly an endless story (**fig 1**). It has been lifelong at the centre of my professional life – and still is today, as I am currently engaged again in debates about a renewed state development programme addressing the fair development of all urban and rural areas of Bavaria, in Germany. A lot of stakeholders take opportunity to raise their voices. The Gemeindetag has a lot of reasons to start the discussion with much power: as a direct consequence of the new times (Olaf Scholz called it: “Turning point”) caused by Putin’s war and of all following socioeconomic consequences and set off also by the climate change, especially increasing temperatures and draughts everywhere, broken supply chains etc. the society has new and strengthened demands on rural areas and relating urban rural partnerships as provider or producer of food, energy, land, water, timber and other commodities (**fig 2**).

Rural people are not amused when governments - under pressure of urban majorities - want to approve new power traces or windmills countryside with less participation to accelerate the processes. Why should we accept the cut of our landscape and the consumption of our land for the need of urban population without own advantages or equivalent compensation question rural politicians and people. It is a fight about (land)rights, equality, solidarity and balanced territorial Policy. Also in France, the motherland of human rights, increased discussions are reported like why e.g., fast growing cities are allowed to withdraw the groundwater from the hinterland. See also many other water battles around the globe. On the other side farmers and rural communities are facing critical questions from urban sides about high water consuming, harmful to environment agriculture and animal husbandry and about typical rural high land consumption.

We face a new urban-rural relationship with a lot of new tensions! Can new partnerships loosen it?

The debate is nowhere new, but it is now radically intensified.

II.

It was one of the highlights of my FIG Presidency that nearly 20 years ago the Marrakech declaration on “Urban-rural interrelationship for sustainable development” was published by such prominent authors like Prof. Stig Enemark or Rob Mahoney (**fig 3**).

Both know naturally like many of us that the issue of urban-rural cooperation was already painted in the Middle Ages (1338) by Ambrogio Lorenzetti. His famous allegories about good and bad governance in Siena are a huge magnet for all tourists. His message about the consequences of bad governance for a country and its people is stunning (**fig 4**).

Let’s jump to the year 2003. There was not only the Marrakech Conference, but it was also the year when UN-Habitat organised a parallel event held on 9 May 2003 in Nairobi on the occasion of its 19th governing council. The topic was the future of Cities! Naturally! Whatever?

I was one of three speakers there. Unexpectedly for the audience I started my speech with a rural outlook on the future of cities, citing the Potsdam Declaration Rural 21 (**fig 5**): *“Rural areas and urban areas jointly form regions and are partners of regional development. A large-scale reconciliation of interests and improved cooperation within and between regions must be part and goal of this development partnership.”* And I concluded with the sentence: **“The future of cities lies, in no small way, in the future of rural areas too”**.

In fact, every one of us could somehow talk about this issue because we all are affected. It is either we are born in rural or urban places, or we have moved during or after our study times from rural to urban or as young family from urban to peri-urban or rural or as elderly people back again from rural to urban. And every one of us who does not close his/her eyes against the situation of today, knows many urban and rural problems – despite the regular positive government statements which appear to me like a “praying somebody is healthy.”

Yes, it is more than ever time to discuss this topic globally, regionally, and locally! To discuss not only between parliaments and governments but also between universities, academia, stakeholders, citizens, and NGOs.

Have we not achieved what we once optimistically have hoped? Many partners have joined our Marrakech Declaration and have discussed it at FIG Congresses several times. I am happy that we once again discuss the urban rural topic, fortunately on the bases of many new articles and reports from, especially of the UN-Habitat (**fig 6**). I would like to call your attention to other recent papers, like the report of the German High Level Commission paper on “Equivalent Living Conditions” which was established to evaluate the situation of urban and rural areas (**fig 7**). In Bavaria, this happened quite earlier. Three (3) Members of the Bavarian commission **were surveyors and DVW members!**

There must be some reasons for the renaissance of this topic!

Every one of us (whether living, working, or advising in urban or rural places around the globe) is still confronted with the often-cited dichotomy between rural and urban areas, nowadays enforced increasingly also on political level. Brexiteers, Trump voters and the AfD trailers in Germany (mis)use the physical divide and frustration of rural people for political campaigns against the “urban others” and urban elites – unintentionally but unfortunately supported by (new urban) economists who argue against supporting rural areas from purely economic view! **We face more and more the threat of a societal and political divide between rural and urban globally.** This should be more discussed and reflected in the many technical papers about urban-rural linkages.

The fact is: we have not yet reached a fair balance between sustainable urban (I mean in this case big cities and their agglomerations including peri-urban) and sustainable rural development like it was the hope of Potsdam Declaration or later of SDG. We have not yet solved the urban or rural problems.

In the light of overcrowded, densified, overheated and more and more expensive and unaffordable cities with growing urban poor and big ecological footprints and many more problems on the one side and emptying, ageing and extensive youth, and jobless rural areas and hollow villages on the other side; we realize the painful truth of Edgar Faure’s famous saying:

“If rural areas don’t breathe anymore, the urban areas and cities will suffocate” (fig 8).

III.

Chinas Rural Revitalization

China is an impressive example for drawing vigorous consequences. It's leaders realized that the one-sided development of large cities in the east was wrong and was becoming a threat for their political and social stability (**fig 9**). Their new politics since 2017 aims at strengthening the rural country and bringing wealth to rural people by new infrastructure, non-agricultural jobs, qualified academic people, modern agriculture, housing and living standard, reform of land rights etc. to keep rural people in rural areas! This **Rural Revitalization (fig 10)** is guided by growth limitations for some big cities.

Do we find such Revitalization Programmes in African, American, or Asian countries?

China follows in its new spatial development policy the european polycentric system and the idea of well-balanced urban and rural areas (**fig 11**). And Chinese colleagues know very well, at a first glance, that there are contradictory figures. For instance, Germany has a 77% urbanisation rate, and simultaneously still more than 80% of German areas are rural(**fig 12**). That shows very clearly **that urbanization does not exclude rural!**

And: Urban future does not mean that all rural people should move to cities. Unfortunately, a lot of people misunderstand the messages that say, "the future is urban." They think, urban future happens only in big cities or mega agglomerations and move directly there from villages or rural towns thus worsening the urban and rural situations.

Naturally, the UN message about "the future is urban" is true, but one should add immediately: future also in small or medium sized rural towns which should become equipped with modern technical and social infrastructure, digitization, high qualified jobs, university branches (**fig 13**), health care etc. That should be the mission of rural policies like it was earlier also my job!

Rural areas? Do you mean the space and land of farming?

In international papers rural areas should be much more regarded and promoted as a **living and working space** for farmers, entrepreneurs, civil servants, tradesmen with their families and not only as pure farmers homeland or as business areas for foreign investors.

Let me shortly report what happened to me in Cambodia. First time in history Cambodian officials discussed about the spatial order, polycentric system and the hierarchy of Space, Place, Parcel! (**fig 14**). The minister was open for new functions of the rural areas. He recommended me to discuss it with the so called "Youth Group" led by the influential son of Prime Minister Hun Sen. The idea was to convince these academicians with degrees from foreign universities on the need to develop the "Farmers Land" toward more multifunctionality. It was extremely hard to persuade this urban elite about the idea of a better balance between urban and rural areas. They were used to accepting that rural people are very poor and that a lot of them continuously were migrating to Phnom Penh, Siem Reap or Sihanoukville where many of them were forced to leave again.

The idea to uplift the rural areas was no real matter of concern for this urban academic elite. Why? Because their mind said: rural is something inferior. Nobody of them could imagine that in Europe successful people try to live countryside! I saw it in their sceptical eyes: Living Countryside where poverty or rubber plantations and Chinese investors are dominating? Never!

What is going wrong?

In a time when we are demanding changes and “great transformation” and question globalisation strategies, we should use the momentum to ask: What is going wrong and what must be changed when we discuss about urban-rural partnerships?

Do we really have to accept this situation as normal? Does the actual urban exodus caused by Covid restrictions give new hope for rural areas or is this only an intermezzo? (fig 15).

What do our constitutions say about balanced development? In case of Germany, it does not accept spatial inequalities, but it demands equivalent living conditions everywhere. If there is no such constitution the ubiquitous question should be: What does it mean for human rights and human dignity for balanced development? To fight for it only in urban or also in rural? Naturally yes because it prevails the normative principle and idea of **territorial justice (fig 16)** . I have talked about it exactly 4 years ago at the 140th FIG birthday in Athens. In the meantime, many programmes have adopted this idea and use the term **development for all people at all places!** That is quite new and a remarkable success for rural areas. At least in theory! But what happens in reality, and in practice? Why do they not transform the ideas into actions?

According to our own research and experiences the answer is clear: there are a lot of hidden i.e., mental obstacles. We need a sincere appreciation of the **“right to rural life”** and not only to the city, but we also need mutual respect and honest discussions at eye level. The goal of urban-rural partnerships should be to strengthen and complete each other and not to dominate or exploit the “partner.”

There is no doubt that we have to further strengthen the programmes and strategies to improve the rural situation.

But for me this is not the real problem; rather, it is a lack of seriousness in the will to succeed. It is a lack of the appropriate mindset!

IV.

Therefore, lets change the status of our Mind!

That means...

1. We should internalize it: The best support for strengthening rural areas is to **relieve and decelerate the overcrowded and stressed cities** and thus better **balance the population of our countries**. According to observations of my Master students, **“African leaders don`t focus enough on rural areas. They do not put the money to the rural bases. Instead, they focus much more on urban centres and investors, who want to earn quick money.”** We can relieve the cities of their many problems if we solve the problems at the roots. That is, in the rural areas! Start rural economy according to the motto: *“bring the jobs to the people and not the people to the jobs”*.

I want to call on everyone to discuss these issues in detail in the upcoming commission sessions. Our discussions should also include the effects of FDI which are very often the cause of rural-urban migration.

2. Naturally – it`s our topic today- **we need more serious and honest partnerships between metropolitan cities and the rural country**: this means in Bavaria partnerships between 15% and 85% of the areas (fig 17). We have already started some partnerships like EMM and EMN (fig 18) covering a lot of rural areas, but it still does not work ideally. The large cities still want to grow and

attract global companies and don't want to relinquish in favour of quite attractive and much cheaper rural centres with local universities, delocated state offices and hidden champions etc. The new Munich companies (e.g., Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Apple) were deliberately attracted. They are bad examples for urban-rural partnership because the damage they cause for rural areas is quite high. Their global job machines in the city have an effect like huge hoovers. They once again extract young people from rural regions with the promise of high salaries. But Munich City is not only a winner: the losers are its "normal inhabitants" due to increased scarcity of land, loss of green areas and resilience and extremely expensive houses and flats and higher living costs.

A good partnership strengthens each partner, shares joint burdens, and chances and acknowledges the existence and good future of each other. For further details, I want to refer you to the guidelines e.g., of GLTN (author Prof. Chigbu) (**fig 19**) and other international Institutions and to the FIG Commission Sessions.

Partnership is the order of the day, and also within the rural towns and communities: the famous European Programme Integrated Rural Development supports such networks and initiates endogenous strength (**fig 20**). Until now they could not really reduce the growing disparities and economic divide in a larger scale. It is like a rabbit hedgehog game, the cities grow always faster.

3. Why should we and how can we change the mind?

It is our mind which leads to the lack of will to consequently and ultimately fight for the future of rural areas. We still have not really understood what Edgar Faure once said. We have the same situation with the climate crisis. We know the facts and the ultimate need to act but still we don't do enough. We know that rural areas are indispensable for our life and future, but we don't do enough. Either it is the mental disregard of rural areas like I could note it with my German and international students ("inferior rural"), or it is a one-sided sight of economists or businesspeople ("no economic return"), or politicians ("too less voters for me") or journalists... or... or...

We need a societal mind-shift like it is lamented by DIE ZEIT (**fig 21**) and described in Maja Göpels "The Great Mindshift" (**fig 22**).

We should especially open the mind of young people and give them information toward rural chances by comprehensive rural (not agricultural) thinking and territorial planning. Mostly young people are totally urban-oriented and don't believe in a rural future." *Why do you want to see our boring hinterland?*" Was the question I was asked in Jamaica, "why not Kingston town" or "What did Prof. Magel say: Ghana is still a rural country?" The students in Kumasi were not amused.

We must take clear position and should uncover inconsistencies like it happens in my country: on the one side the Prime Minister talks that "the Soul of Bavaria lies in rural areas", demands with great posture the deceleration of growth of Munich agglomeration and the shift of workplaces countryside and on the other side he welcomes the setting of Apple, Google, Amazon, Microsoft in Munich. That is no credible politics!

We, the FIG community, must fight against these inconsistencies. We have to "volunteer for the future" **promoting honest and equal urban-rural partnerships** "for a better living"!

To get the right energy for this fight lets finally have a look at the paintings of Lorenzetti (**fig 23**) about good governance and good urban-rural partnership: we harvest wealth and happiness on both sides!