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006	1.	INTRODUCTION Simon Bell	036	5.	FULL PAPERS AND PECHA KUCHA PAPERS
010	2.	WELCOME TO UNIVERSITY COLLEGE GHENT Stefanie Delarue	038	5.1.	Human and Nature Group A
014	3.	LANDSCAPES OF CONFLICT Organising Committee ECLAS 2018	070	5.1.	Human and Nature Group D
022	4.	KEYNOTE LECTURES	170	5.1.	Human and Nature Group I
024	4.1.	Piet Chielens 'The Men and Women who Planted Trees' Coordinator In Flanders Fields Museum (Ypres, BE)	204	5.1.	Human and Nature Group M
026	4.2.	Peter Vanden Abeele: 'Conflict Driven Development. Five Tips and Tricks' City Government Architect Ghent (BE)	254	5.2.	Planting Design and Ecology Group B
028	4.3.	Elke Rogge 'Get Your Ducks In A Row! The Potential of Systems Thinking in the Design of Landscapes of Conflict' Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Coordinator In Flanders (BE)	298	5.2.	Planting Design and Ecology Group J
030	4.4.	Matthew Powers: 'Re-aligning the Roots of Thought' Associate Professor Clemson University (USA)	350	5.3.	Conservation and Development Group C
032	4.5.	Peter Swyngedauw 'Over de Rand: A Plea for the Landscape Architect as a Chief Architect' Bureau OMGEVING (BE)	386	5.3.	Conservation and Development Group K
034	4.6.	Bas Smets 'Augmented Landscapes in Search of the Resilience of the Territory' Bureau Bas Smets (BE)	440	5.3.	Conservation and Development Group O
			500	5.4.	Participation and Coproduction Group F
			550	5.5.	Teaching and Learning Group G
			608	5.6.	Theory and Practice Group H
			652	5.6.	Theory and Practice Group L
			698	5.6.	Theory and Practice Group P
			752	5.7.	Experience and Economy Group N
			806	6.	POSTERS

COVER IMAGE

La Bataille de l'Argonne, 1964.
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5.3. CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

GROUP O

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Virtual Reality for Contested
Landscapes
Jørgensen Karsten
Landscape Interventions for Embracing
New Wilderness
Pierre Oskam

The Design History of Maksimir Park -
Plan Evolution and Contemporary Use
as Basis for Future Plan Development
Iva Rechner Dika & Martin van den Toorn

Tree Diversity in the Three Botanic
Gardens of Lisbon: From the 18th to the
21st Century
Andreia de Sousa & Ana Luísa Soares

A Peri-Urban Combat Zone Where
Urban Edge Meets Rural Periphery
Across an International Boundary
Richard Stiles

A Peri-Urban Combat Zone Where Urban Edge Meets Rural Periphery Across an International Boundary

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ABSTRACT

Peri-urban landscapes are a neglected category of the European Landscape Convention, yet they in Europe cover at least as much area as urban landscapes and are growing at a much faster rate. In fact the much publicised growth in the world's urban population will in fact result in the further expansion of peri-urban areas rather than the increase of urban ones.

Peri-urbanisation is a recognisable phase in the development of urban form, as memorably summarised by the 'egg diagram' of the architect Cedric Price. The idea of the 'scrambled city' was further elaborated upon and operationalised within the context of the EU's PLUREL project, which itself was a response to the 2006 report of 'Urban Sprawl' by the European Environment Agency.

PLUREL looked at the phenomenon of peri-urbanisation at the European scale, but to understand it better concrete examples are useful, especially those which exhibit unusual conditions that distort the normal processes. One such example occurs at the border between Austria and Slovakia, where the capital city of Bratislava borders on a rural settlement Kittsee on the Austrian side, with its apricot orchards and where traditional strip fields form an atypical peri-urban landscape.

INTRODUCTION: PROBLEMS OF THE PERI-URBAN ZONE

Peri-urban landscapes might with some justification, be called the 'Cinderellas' - the most neglected - of Europe's landscape types. Although the European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe, 2000) assures us that they are just as important as urban, rural and natural landscapes, they tend to be overlooked and ignored in favour of the landscapes of urban areas or rural regions.

This paper attempts to challenge this trend by considering three ways into understanding the mysteries of the peri-urban landscape in the hope and expectation that it can be given more of the recognition that it deserves and to help counter the 'bad press' from which it suffers. These three approaches can be described respectively as ... playful and diagrammatic, systematic and analytical and finally concrete and specific.

Firstly, though, it is useful to question why it is that the importance of the landscape of peri-urban areas is apparently so neglected in the current discourse, as compared for example to urban landscapes. The widely quoted United Nations' statistic, predicting that over two thirds of the world's people will live in cities by 2050 is well known. Similarly familiar is the fact that in Europe this figure has already been surpassed, where nearly three quarters of the population are urban dwellers. What is less appreciated is that in fact this data applies at least as much, if not more, to peri-urban areas as it does to urban ones: the result of this growth in the 'urban' population is in practice a massive expansion of peri-urban rather than urban areas. So perhaps it is a problem of definitions or terminology rather than a fundamental lack of awareness of the issues. Peri-urban landscapes are therefore clearly worthy of far more attention than they currently receive. Associated with this is the question of how, where and indeed when to draw the boundaries between the urban and the peri-urban. In the

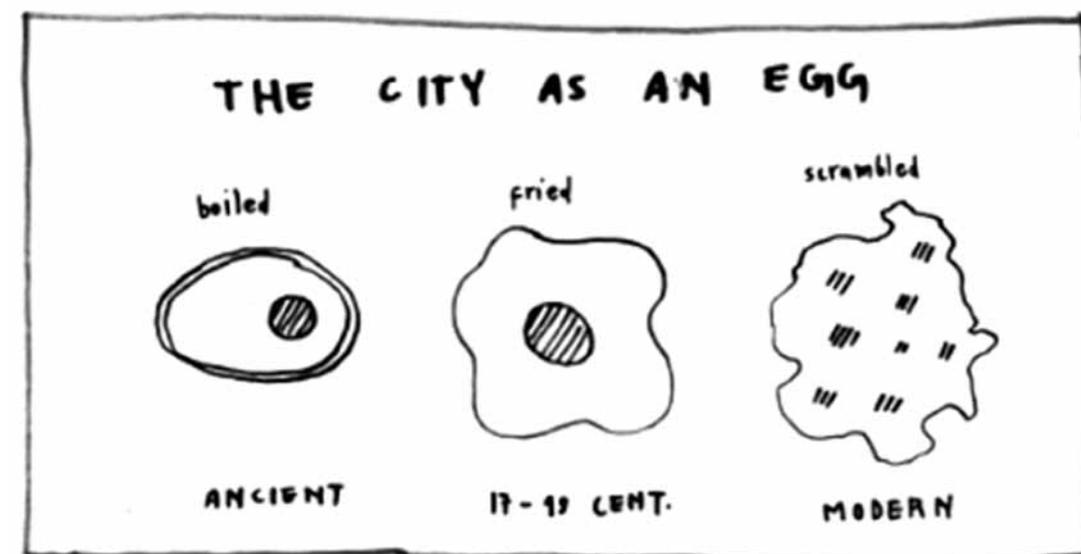


Figure 1: Cedric Price's brilliantly simple illustration of the 'city in history'
Source: <http://www.imaginingcities.com/image/88442914756> - Accessed 25.07.2018

search for some general enlightenment, here we can bring in the first of our approaches to unlocking the mysteries of the peri-urban landscape.

HOW DO YOU LIKE YOUR EGGS FOR BREAKFAST?

The English architect Cedric Price once famously explained the history and development of urban form, and thus indirectly the rise of the peri-urban zone, through the brilliantly simple medium of the breakfast egg. In this simple 'back on an envelope' sketch (Fig. 1) he also provided us with an initial way in to the topic of the peri-urban landscape.

First on the menu was the boiled egg, with its hard shell - the city wall - enclosing and protecting its contents. The Mediaeval city was clearly separated from its rural hinterland with the city walls forming an unmistakable boundary, a clean break between the urban and the rural. There was no peri-urban landscape: beyond the city wall you would only find agricultural fields. The most urban feature likely to be encountered here was the occasional encampment of a besieging army, which at best might perhaps be described in today's terminology as a

kind of 'pop-up' peri-urban zone. This model of the 'compact European city' is still the one that influences much urban design thinking today.

The breaking down of the city walls transformed the mediaeval city and, while the urban core remained largely unchanged, the residential 'egg-white' began to spread out into the surrounding landscape as the threat of besieging armies receded. The definition of the urban edge became distinctly less clear and the beginnings of a peri-urban landscape can be surmised as it also became possible to move some of the less attractive uses out of the core city.

From the industrial revolution onwards the impacts of local transportation systems - first railways and then the private car - meant that both residential uses but also some core functions such as employment and shopping could migrate to the periphery, thus creating the scrambled cities with which we are now familiar. With the seemingly unstoppable rise of peri-urbanity and the dilution - if not complete disappearance - of the rural landscape around urban centres, today's urban form was born. Indeed many of the new industrially driven

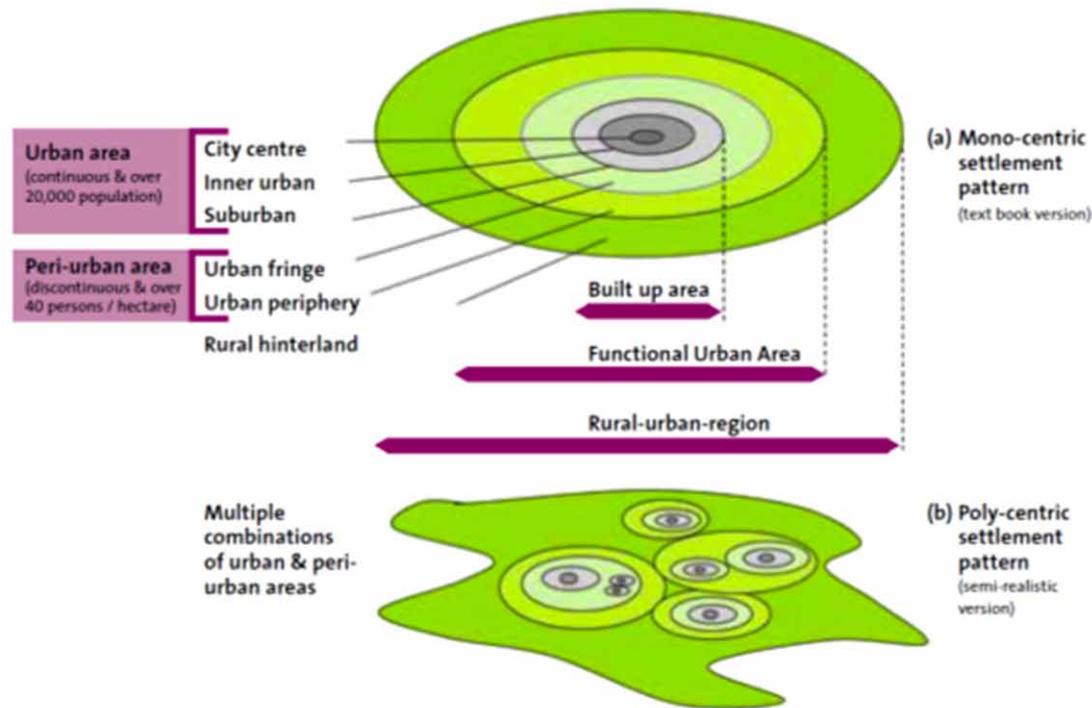


Figure 2: Model of peri-urban areas as defined by the PLUREL Project - the egg acquires some extra layers Source: PLUREL Project, Synthesis Report p. 25 Fig. 2: Peri-urban areas & the 'rural-urban-region' Accessible from: www.plurel.org

agglomerations established in the coal fields of the nineteenth century, such as the Ruhr District in Germany or the Black Country in England, consisted almost entirely of 'scrambled' peri-urban landscape.

SPRAWL AND THE CONSEQUENCES

One important reason for the bad press which peri-urban landscapes receive is the fact that they are inextricably associated with the phenomenon of urban sprawl. The Europe-wide dimensions of this threat were brought to public attention through a study conducted by the European Environment Agency (EEA, 2006). This documented the spread of low density and apparently unplanned urbanisation across the whole of Europe using consistent data, and drew the conclusion that there was an urgent need for action to respond to the challenge. Between the publication of the EEA study and the response from

the European Union, a detailed research review of the topic was published by two Belgian researchers (Meus and Gulinck, 2008) in which they introduced a new term: 'semi-urban landscapes'. By way of an answer, the European Union sponsored a large-scale research effort under the auspices of the 6th Framework Programme, the result of which was the PLUREL Project. PLUREL (Piorr, Ravetz and Tosics, 2011), investigated the phenomenon of peri-urbanisation in Europe, pointing out that "Areas classified as peri-urban are growing four times faster than urban areas."

The PLUREL Project extended and refined Cedric Price's egg model to develop a more differentiated view of today's scrambled egg cities. Peri-urban areas were defined as comprising: 'discontinuous built development, containing settlements of less than 20,000, with an average density of at least 40 persons per km² (averaged over 1km² cells)'. This definition of peri-urban land also placed it within a



Figure 3: The Austrian-Slovak border to the south-west of Bratislava-Petržalka Source: Google Maps. <https://www.google.co.uk/maps/place/Bratislava,+Slovakia/@48.1112916,17.0728255,9517m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m5!3m4!1s0x476c89360aca6197:0x631f9b82fd884368!8m2!3d48.1485965!4d17.1077478> Accessed 25.07.2018



Figure 4: Bratislava, Kittsee and the unregulated Danube in the late 18th century Source: Source: [Mapire The Historical Map Portal](http://mapire.eu/en/). <https://mapire.eu/en/>

wider view of the urban-regional system as a whole (Piorr, Ravetz and Tosics 2011:25).

The overall urban-regional system included the following categories:

- Urban core – which includes the Central Business District and other civic functions;
- Inner urban area – generally higher density built development (built-up areas);
- Suburban area – generally lower density contiguous built-up areas attached to inner urban areas and where houses are typically not more than 200 metres apart;
- Urban fringe – a zone along the edges of the built-up area, consisting of a scattered pattern of lower density settlement areas, urban concentrations at transport hubs and large green open spaces;
- Urban periphery – a zone surrounding the main built-up areas with a lower population density, but belonging to the Functional Urban Area. This can include smaller settlements, industrial areas and other urban land uses;
- Rural hinterland – rural areas surrounding the peri-urban area, but within the rural-urban region.

This model was clearly defined from a morphological point of view, in terms of built density and continuity of development as well as taking population density into account, and was applied across the whole of the EU 27 European Union (not yet including Croatia), such that the study area was defined as comprising a mosaic of 903 contiguous urban-regional systems. Peri-urban areas were defined as the combination of the urban fringe and the urban periphery.

The study concluded that the extent of peri-urban areas across Europe was equal to that of urban

areas, but that their population density was only half as great. Peri-urban areas were characterised as having an inefficient and fragmented pattern of land use with consequent effects on wildlife habitats and 'amenity values' as well as negative social impacts. Those regions with the greatest proportion of peri-urban land were generally those with the highest levels of economic growth, and particular problems were seen to exist where high areas of peri-urban land came into contact with strong agricultural sectors. PLUREL's recommendations included the need for a strategic approach to land use planning at the rural-urban-regional scale as well as local policies to coordinate the efforts of all parties concerned in the direction of an integrated approach to development. In this context the governance issues are both particularly important but also particularly difficult. In many, if not most cases within the rural urban regions there are many, sometimes overlapping authorities with different and often competing interests and concerns. Furthermore administrative boundaries rarely coincide with the land use categories defined in Fig. 2, and across Europe the situation can be very different from country to country, although even these differences pale into insignificance when international borders run through peri-urban landscapes, as we will see below.

In order to go further, and to look at the peri-urban landscape as addressed in the European Landscape Convention, it is necessary to move from the general European viewpoint to look at the specific local context. This leads us into the third approach in our investigation: the need to consider a specific peri-urban landscape situation.

BRATISLAVA - KITTSEE: A PERI-URBAN LANDSCAPE WHERE RURAL VILLAGE MEETS CAPITAL CITY ACROSS AN INTERNATIONAL

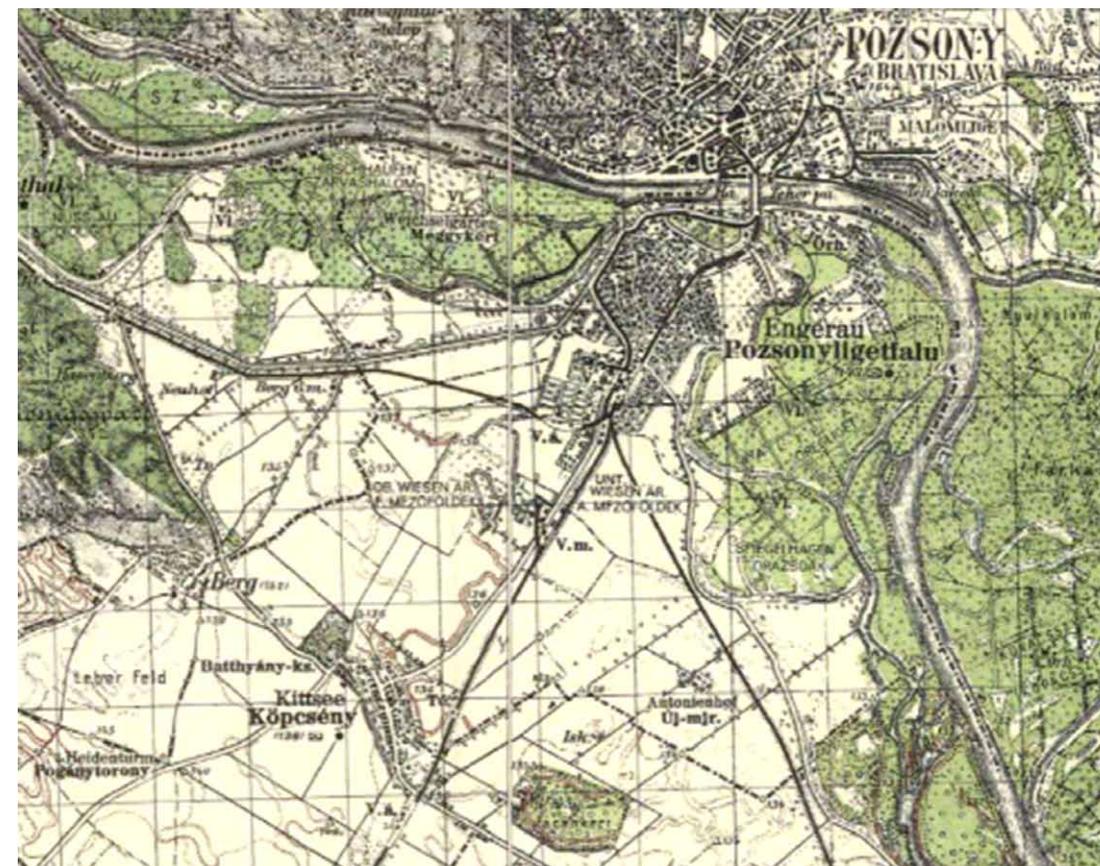


Figure 5: The territory between Bratislava and Kittsee according to a 1941 military map
Source: Source: *Mapire The Historical Map Portal*. <https://mapire.eu/en/>

BOUNDARY

When studying a particular phenomenon, it makes sense to look at a concrete example of a particular situation in order to judge how well the schematic models stand up in practice. It can be even more instructive, however, if one can find a particular example where the situation deviates from the norm, such that some at least of the influencing factors are de-coupled from one another and perhaps their action can be seen more clearly.

The situation in question involves two adjacent administrative districts between which an international boundary runs, one which was previously part of the so-called 'iron curtain' dividing Europe into two ideological halves. Although a generation has now passed since this

geo-political divide was dismantled, the international boundary remains and creates a situation in which the peri-urban landscape takes on a unique dimension.

The two administrative districts concerned are Bratislava, the capital city of Slovakia with a population of some 430,000 and the Austria village of Kittsee, population 3,073 (2017 data quoted from Wikipedia). The main square of Kittsee is less than one kilometre from the border on the Austria side, while Bratislava's post-war district of Petržalka comes to an abrupt end less than 500 metres from the border on the Slovak side. Between them are a motorway squeezed in on the Slovak side and arable strip fields on the Austrian side. Only the change in field patterns marks the boundary on the ground, as does the absence



Figure 6: Kittsee and Bratislava – a peri-urban combat zone where rural meets the edge of urban. Source: Google Maps.

of the otherwise common features of peri-urban landscape sprawl (Fig. 3).

In many other disciplines such as unusual or exceptional situations are exploited in order to throw light on how the 'normal' system functions - be they mutations in the field of genetics or stroke patients in neurology. Perhaps the exceptional coincidence of national borders and urban edges in this case can help to throw light on the genesis and dynamics of peri-urban landscapes. To what extent can this unusual situation provide a unique opportunity to study the dynamics of landscapes on the edges of large and growing cities?

Looking at today's plan of the Bratislava it can be seen that where the Austrian border meets the city, a large slice of what would otherwise be a roughly circular form appears to be missing to the south-west, thereby limiting both the further expansion of the city in this direction as well as the development of urban fringe uses. As a result, the peri-urban landscape in this segment is entirely rural with arable strip-fields reaching right to the border, but on the Austrian side (Fig. 3). This is the not the only direction in

which further urban development is restricted. To the north and west the Lesser Carpathians border the city, while a large chemical plant limits further urban growth to the south. The main area of urban expansion is thus in the north-easterly direction, along the foothills of the Lesser Carpathians. Thus - in the terminology of PLUREL - to the south-west of the city the 'rural hinterland' (of Austria) abuts directly on to suburban zone of Bratislava, although all the zones appear to be present to the north-east. Or to express things in the terms of Cedric Price: the eggshell is still in place in the southwest of the city, while to the north east it has become thoroughly scrambled, especially since the fall of the Iron Curtain.

The relationship between the city of Bratislava and village Kittsee has changed over time, as both the landscape and the geopolitics of the region have evolved. At the time of the first military survey (1763-1787) undertaken within the Austro-Hungarian empire in the late 18th century under Joseph II, it can be seen from the map in Figure 4 that Kittsee (here shown under its Hungarian name of

Köpcseny as it then belonged to the Hungarian part of the dual monarchy) was linked to Bratislava (then known by its German name as Pressburg) by a tree-lined avenue. The area to the south of the unregulated Danube, in the bend in the river became the location of the post-war urban expansion of the city, resulting in the district of Petržalka which now stretches up to the Austrian-Slovak border. While the location of the (inter)national boundary, shown in red to the east of Kittsee in Figure 4, indicates that both it and Bratislava were at the time on the same (Hungarian) side of the border.

A military map dating from 1941 (Figure 5) shows the important railway connections within this area, only parts of which still exist. What it does not show, is the fact that in the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, the eastern part of the territory of the village of Kittsee was ceded to Bratislava and now forms a part of Petržalka.

With the establishment of the 'Iron Curtain' at the end of the Second World War, and the subsequent construction of the district of Petržalka to the south of Danube, the village of Kittsee lost any connection with Bratislava. It became an isolated and largely neglected settlement on the very edge of Western Europe and its population gradually declined from a peak in 1910 of 3,123 to only 1,873 in 2006 (data quoted from Wikipedia). Kittsee is now one of the fastest growing districts in the province, and the main reason for this is that, despite the border - or perhaps because of it - many young Slovak families have moved there as the land prices in Bratislava have risen beyond those across the border.

During the Communist era (1950-1989) the process of urbanisation was dominant in Bratislava, after 1989, however, the process of suburbanisation began to manifest itself. Beginning in 1989-1996, and accelerating from 1996-2002 this was characterised by construction

of family houses on the outskirts of villages around Bratislava. Later, the period 2002-2009 was characterised by the commercial construction of apartment buildings, and since 2009 it has taken the form of cross-border suburbanisation (Slavík et al., 2011, Šveda, Madajová and Podolák et al., 2016). According to Zubrický (2010) migrants from Bratislava to several municipalities in Austria (Berg, Kittsee, Wolfsthal) were attracted by lower property prices and good transport accessibility. As noted by Halás (2018), the current stage of cross-border suburbanisation of Bratislava in Austria is poorly documented, particularly due to difficulties with obtaining relevant data. The perceptions of cross-border region by residents have been investigated for example by Kollár (2001), or by Láštiová, Petrjánošová and Bianchi (2007).

The dynamics of Bratislava development affects the surrounding rural municipalities in the both states. A co-ordinated cross-border territorial development of this area therefore requires in addition to the intensive harmonisation of local needs a structured framework for mutual development planning. For example, the project BAUM funded by European Regional Development Fund focused on the harmonisation of land-use and spatial development activities in the cross-border region and the elaboration of a common strategy for efficient management of the peri-urban cross-border landscape involving an international collaboration between Bratislava and surrounding municipalities, regional authorities, provincial governments and the residents (BAUM, 2011).

In one sense the peri-urban landscape of Bratislava has begun to spread across the border, but only as far as single family houses are concerned. Otherwise, this section of the edge of the city has seemingly been protected from peri-urbanisation by the

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international border. One beneficiary of this process is perhaps the local speciality: the Kittsee Apricot (<http://www.kittseer-marille.at/>). The district boasts some 35,000 fruit trees and a large number of farmers are dependent on its cultivation for their livelihood. Whether this important landscape feature and rural industry could have survived in the peri-urban landscape of a fast-growing capital city such as Bratislava is questionable, were it not for the presence of the border. Such an interesting urban – rural contrast can be considered as a very unique landscape situation and perhaps a strong potential for sustainable development. One of the strategic scenarios could perhaps build upon this quality and use (urban and peri-urban) agricultural landscapes as a shared green centre of Bratislava and Kittsee in a similar way like Aachen (Germany), Maastricht (the Netherlands) and Liège (Belgium) did with their Three Countries Park, which forms the green heart of the Euregio Maas-Rhein (<http://www.drielandenpark.eu>).

While the PLUREL project mentions landscape, its main perspective is an economic and land use one coupled with a concern for efficient governance. The question of landscape tends to be addressed generically from within the overall 'environment' category and from the point of view of conserving existing resources, even if mention is made of the promotion of green-blue infrastructure and measures for climate change mitigation and adaptation. In the Bratislava case, there is otherwise little evidence of a successful 'green belt policy', but across the border the intact Austrian rural landscape reaches to the edge of its southern suburb and seems to have been effective in establishing an international truce within the peri-urban conflict zone. It would seem to offer an interesting potential for further cross-border research into the nature of the peri-urban landscape.

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