



Exploring the metro-hinterland – prospects for the Manchester city-region

Background

Most of England is not urban, or rural, but somewhere between – a new ‘peri-urban’ landscape, in the fringes and hinterlands of cities and city-regions. The rapid changes in such areas bring both problems and opportunities.

In the UK there is the challenge of where to build 3 million houses in the next 12 years – green belts, flood plains, contaminated brownfield sites, or simply further into the countryside? And in the EU, there are much faster growing cities than in the UK – from the Mediterranean sun-belt, to the Central European industrial areas.

In all areas there are compound challenges – climate impacts, road

traffic, ageing population, landscape stress, urban-rural migration, farm changes, tourism impacts, and pressure for urban development.

There is evidence that peri-urban areas are a new kind of geography – neither urban or rural, but a different mix of people and landscape. This reflects a more networked mobile society, but one which also needs local character and quality of life.

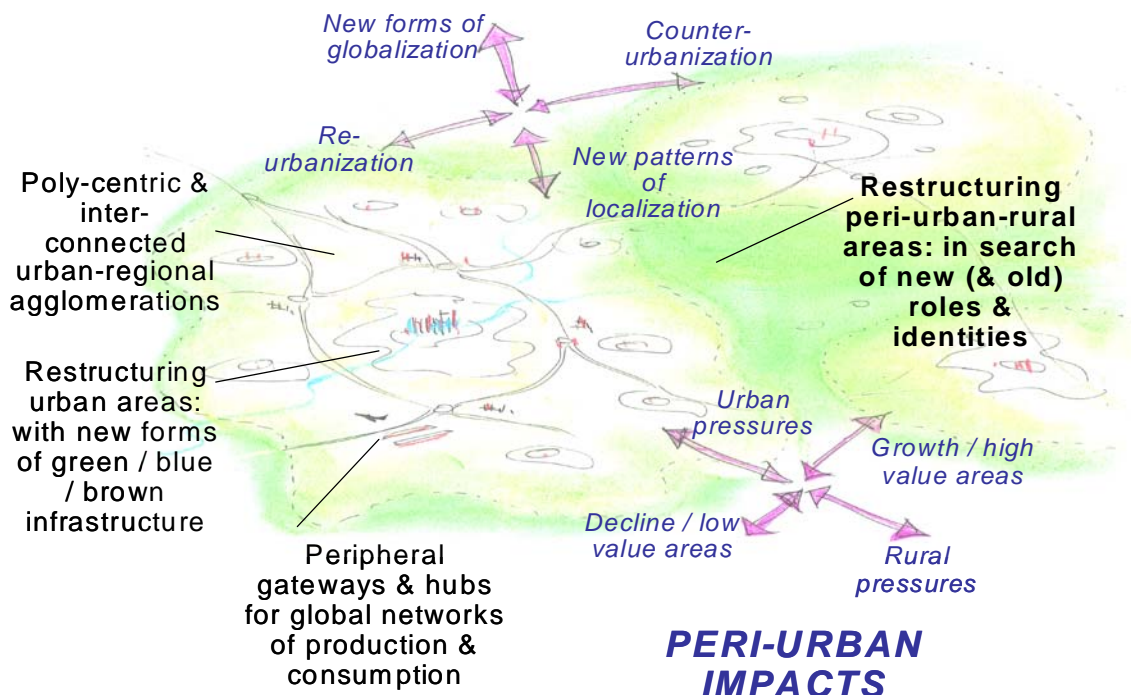
This peri-urban space may be the most common living situation in the 21st century. We should recognize it and work with it.

The PLUREL project

The PLUREL (“Peri-urban Land Use Relationships”) is a large €10m consortium research project, funded by the EC, and coordinated by the University of Copenhagen. It aims to provide a scientific analysis of urbanization and spatial strategy for peri-urban areas (see www.plurel.net for details).

At the centre is a set of in-depth case studies in 7 cities, including one on the Manchester city-region. We aim to provide a unique perspective on the peri-urban-rural areas surrounding the conurbation. We are focusing on two areas with organizations on the ground – the South Pennine area and the Community Forest area.

PERI-URBAN DYNAMICS



PERI-URBAN IMPACTS

What is the city-region

The Manchester city-region is a topical case study for the PLUREL research. This draws from previous work on the 'sustainable city-region', and the application of the TCPA garden city agenda to existing settlements (1)

Firstly, there is no single neat definition of the peri-urban hinterland. There are quasi-administrative boundaries (the AGMA 10 authorities), and economic development partnerships (an additional 6 authorities): there are travel to work areas and a one hour commuting radius: at larger scales there is a sub-regional agglomeration of Greater Manchester / Merseyside, the transpennine M62 'super-city', and the Northern Way agenda. The government's Sub-National Review has raised the questions of 'function and territory'. The new Single Integrated Regional Strategies will need to be smarter in

the application of multi-level governance. There are also different ways to frame the city-region question – for instance, the view from the South Pennines communities is that they provide a Green Heart to at least three conurbations (2).

What is "peri-urbanization"

Something is happening in the peri-urban areas. But this is not necessarily the physical expansion of cities – there are layers of spatial policy, from green belt to protected landscape areas, and a general conservatism in new development. But land-use change is one aspect of broader economic, social and cultural change. Local rural economies or self-contained market towns are shifting rapidly to new roles as satellites and outposts of a much larger and fast moving city-region system.

Land and landscape often becomes degraded by agricultural change, and fragmented by roads and other infrastructure. Fringe developments such as garden

centres increase car traffic and urban sprawl.

Local communities are easily swamped by incoming commuters, while post offices and village shops close down.

The governance system is highly multi-level and often diffused between many actors and many departments. By its nature it falls between urban policy and rural policy. The result is that the special problems and opportunities of peri-urban areas are often under-played and under-resourced.





Dynamics of the peri-urban

The bird's eye graphic above shows some of the dynamics in the peri-urban Manchester city-region area.

The most obvious is the process of **'metropol-ization'** of former rural communities – a transition of economic activities, social types and spatial patterns of work and lifestyle.

This is driven in many ways by the global networks of **'cognitive capitalism'** – a transition which is based not only on new economic functions, but on a knowledge based global economic order – with new kinds of social and cultural lifestyles, attitudes and perceptions. (3)

There is also a counterpart to the trends of mobility and networked globalization – a new kind of **'localization'**, in new kinds of attachments to place and landscape. This points towards the city-region **'blue-green infrastructure'** of open spaces, corridors, waterways, cycle routes as well as established nature conservation sites. Such an infrastructure enables newly affluent / transient (and not so affluent / transient) communities, to identify and locate themselves within a common landscape.

The blue-green infrastructure agenda is one which has been shown many times to increase economic investment, health and education, and social well-being. In practice it is often sidelined and fragmented between different parts of the government machine. However there are many successful

initiatives which find new ways of combining the roles of public, private, civic and community sectors, such as the community forests and country parks, and these are now coming together in a new Green Infrastructure strategy for Greater Manchester (4).

A new generation of partnership organizations, such as Pennine Prospects, show new possibilities in multi-level, multi-sectoral networked types of strategy-making; and these in turn can help to mobilize local social enterprises. One example is the Todmorden 'Incredible Edible' scheme for local food cultivation (above) (5).

The graphic also shows the tensions between globalization and localization, and their spatial dimensions –

- Inward pull – urbanization or re-urbanization;
- Outward push – counter-urbanization.

Both of these can be seen from analysis of the Manchester city-region. The city centre urban renaissance suits younger professionals: while families and older people tend to move outwards to smaller settlements.

Impacts, winners & losers

These driving forces produce a range of impacts, as shown at the lower part of the birds-eye graphic.

- Growth & high value development impacts;
- Decline & low value activity impacts;

- Urbanization & urban growth impacts;
- Rural change & restructuring impacts.

Such impacts are often focused on certain places or certain communities, and we can simplify the result into two extremes –

- Positive environments contain country parks, horse stables and niche garden centres. 'Winners' drive to work in the sunrise business parks, live in high value housing, and access the nearby airport and shopping mall.
- Negative environments are next to motorways or landfill sites, with no entry to degraded land. 'Losers' might live in failing suburbs or regeneration areas, with falling values, with the wrong kind of skills and training, and with a marginal place in the landscape.

This is a caricature of a complex situation, but it does map out the range of problems and opportunities.

Is it possible to shape a complex city-region to produce better outcomes for both ends of the spectrum?

To respond to this, the rest of this paper follows a process of 'policy scenario testing'. This includes four main stages:

- Identify policy agendas;
- Map out alternative scenarios;
- Review & test policy responses;
- Explore new opportunities.

Policy questions

The review so far of the Manchester city-region has produced a menu of key questions for peri-urban areas. The 'Rural Economy Baseline' study set out the basic evidence, and this is complemented by spatial and policy analysis.

Some of these questions are already policy items – others fall through the gaps between urban and rural policy regimes.

Environmental questions:

- Climate change – what would be the impacts of climate change on peri-urban areas? And how can they best be adapted to extreme weather in the future? Will strong climate mitigation policies mean a return to the cities?
- Multi-functional land-use: are we making the best of our precious land – particularly where roads and other infrastructure spread concrete all over it?
- Farming and food: while there are new stewardship schemes, how much will the landscape continue to be degraded and inaccessible? Is it possible or desirable to feed the city from its surroundings?

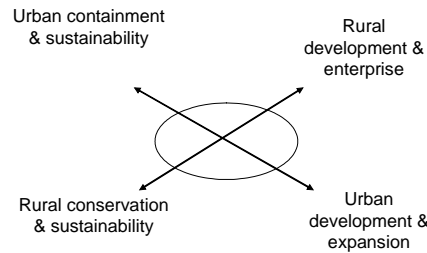
Economic questions:

- Can we enable businesses to grow without conflict with planning / environment policy?
- Are peri-urban areas likely to be dormitories and satellites, or viable local economies in their own right?

Social questions:

- Deprivation and exclusion: will the changing mix in peri-urban areas magnify the polarization of society?
- Are we making the most of opportunities for health, leisure and education in the peri-urban areas?

Peri-urban policy agendas



Policy “agendas”

Spatial policy or local economic development, of course, will aim to respond to both problems and opportunities – but it can only act with some ‘agenda’, or definition of ‘what is the problem?’ Such questions can get political, as every policy creates both winners and losers. We can chart out different policy agendas, coming from urban and rural directions, and from a growth or a conservation angle (CURE, 2003):

- Urban containment / sustainability; with policies such as Green Belt, this uses peri-urban areas as a boundary for the city.
- Urban development & expansion; this focuses on feeding the city with infrastructure such as roads, airports, business parks and retail parks.
- Rural conservation / sustainability; here the countryside is seen as an asset for a mainly urban population, enhancing landscape and ecological qualities.
- Rural development & enterprise – favours small business development which can easily conflict with the conservation agenda.

This helps to understand the range of problems and opportunities – and then to see where current policies are working, in conflict, sub-optimal, sensitive to future changes, or simply missing.

Policy review

Spatial policy:

At the regional level the NW Spatial Strategy prioritizes the re-use of urban land and containment of urban growth through Green Belt and similar policies. Peri-urban areas are seen as a ‘problem’ in that any development may detract from open land and landscape.

At the landscape level, there is recognition that Green Belt, Areas of Landscape Value and similar policies generally serve their purpose, but often without positive benefits for land or land-use.

For transport, there is a general policy direction in favour of public transport, but road building still claims the majority of funding.

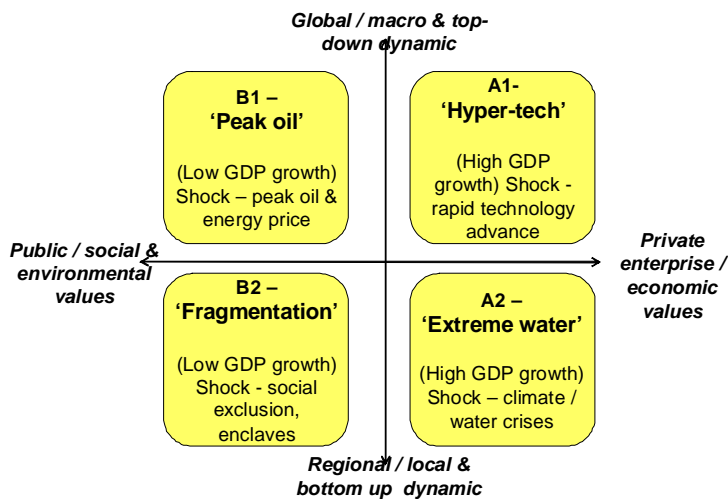
Environmental policy:

- Climate change is new on the block – so far attention has focused on rural and urban areas, but with little as yet on the impacts and adaptation strategies on the peri-urban landscape. The effect on peri-urban areas of peak oil or strong climate policy is there to be explored.
- Community forestry is well established as a partnership programme, which should expand and transfer lessons to other areas. The wider Green Infrastructure agenda has brought new thinking on economic and social benefits. However it is still marginal in terms of access to funding and land tenure.
- There is a new agenda for local food and sustainable farming, with many examples of social enterprise – but at present it is still marginal in comparison to the mainstream.

Economic and social policy:

The LEADER programme which is now on the ground in the South Pennine area, is based on locally-led actions covering three strands: -

Scenario framework - summary



- improving the competitiveness of farming and forestry sectors;
- improving the environment and countryside;
- rural quality of life and diversification of the rural economy.

The current level of funding is spread over a wide area and will need careful packaging in order to add real value.

The Rural Development Plan for England (RDPE) has a sub-regional peri-urban agenda (titled 'rural') which is just now emerging. However as it is targeted only on the identified postcodes in the 'rural' areas of Greater Manchester the funding is very modest, with many competing claims on it, and again it needs to be packaged with other sources for added value.

Scenario futures

The next stage is to test current policies against possible future changes.

Scenarios are 'stories of the future' which help in foreseeing possible risks and opportunities with rapid and unpredictable change. They are not forecasts, rather asking a series of 'what-if' questions (for example, 'what-if' the global credit system was to melt down??).

The PLUREL project applies 4 different scenario types to explore the possible futures for peri-urban areas across Europe. These are based on the global IPCC climate assessment scenarios, with added 'shocks' and rapid changes. These are being adapted to the prospects for the Manchester city-region.

The chart shows each of the scenarios as a combination of two main axes –

- globalization or localization
- public interest or private enterprise.

'Hyper-tech' scenario: globalized and privatized

This describes a future of rapid economic growth, global population that peaks in mid-century, and the spread of new technologies. For peri-urban areas in Europe, small 'polycentric' towns and cities become even more popular. New transport modes lead to more rapid journeys, and the expansion of the

commuting distances around towns and cities. This leads to peri-urbanisation / 'metropolit-isation' of rural areas on a massive scale.

In the Manchester city-region, the dominant city centre is networked outwards, to the airports and motorway junctions around the region. Unrestricted peri-urban development turns these nodes into booming business and residential clusters. A new range of private health and education facilities accelerates the transition to a 'gated society'.

A2 – 'extreme water' scenario: localized and privatized

This is a more heterogeneous world of self reliance and preservation of local identities. Peri-urban areas are strongly affected; vulnerable city-regions such as London or Merseyside spend huge sums of money on defence and adaptation strategies. Population growth due to climate-induced migration puts more pressure on urban infrastructure and services.

In the Manchester city-region this would see a resurgence of local identities – not all of them benign or tolerant to outsiders. In the South Pennines this builds on the tradition of local self-reliance. On the Mersey plains the re-afforestation programme would run into challenges from communities and landowners preferring local short term benefits.

B1 – ‘peak oil’ scenario: globalized government

This shows a growth of social and environmental consciousness – a global approach to sustainable development, involving governments, businesses and households. For peri-urban areas, high energy prices have a strong effect on locations, as transport costs limit commuting distances. Although tele-working is encouraged, many people attempt to return to larger cities and towns, and more remote rural areas become cut off.

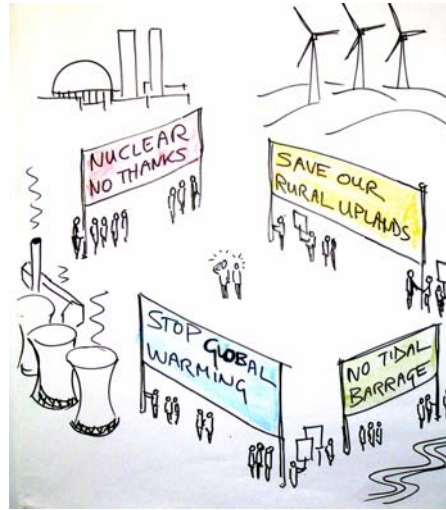
In the Manchester city-region, the effects might be to reinforce the strategic planning of the city-region, bringing housing, jobs and services closer together, and connected by green infrastructure for walking, cycling and riding. Large peri-urban areas of under-used land would be claimed for production of food or energy crops.

B2 – ‘fragmentation’ scenario: localized communities

Here the EU sees a fragmentation of society, in terms of age, ethnicity and general lack of trust. The ethnic division of cities is driven by the increased in-migration of the working-age population from outside and within the EU. Cities become more dispersed as younger migrants dominate city centres and older natives populate the outskirts and enclaves outside the cities, so that peri-urban areas become ‘peri-society’ areas.

In the Manchester city-region, power and resources shift towards the regional and local authorities. This sounds fine, except that wealthy areas start to put up barriers and withdraw funding from poorer areas. Strategic planning of housing and services dwindles, although there is a resurgence of social enterprise which takes over many public services.

Overall, these scenarios show the possibilities for the medium future which are very different to that of today. They show that the prospects for peri-urban areas are very sensitive to powerful trends such as urbanization, employment, lifestyles, climate change and so on.



Scenario policy testing

This is the focus of the stakeholder workshop in February 2009. In advance of that, below are a few examples and pointers.

Climate change policy:

This is of course dependent on physical climate change, which is a global level issue. The current evidence seems to be in two strands – one with rapid but gradual changes of 2-4^o temperature rise by the end of this century – and another based on recent observations, which sees much more rapid and chaotic climate change events (PIRC, 2008).

Within the city-region, there are great uncertainties on social, economic and political conditions. It is not yet clear what kind of peri-urban policies will be able to deal with major disruptions, such as severe droughts and heat waves: severe storms and floods: rapid soil erosion, ecological habitat retreat and woodland die-off.

Food and farming policy:

The question of feeding the city over-arches the peri-urban areas. While affluent industrial cities such as Manchester take global supply chains for granted, there is a new agenda for local food cultivation, on the grounds of health, education, local economies and community development. Previous investigation showed the potential within Greater Manchester to be about 5% of the demand (Ravetz, 2000). This is now being revisited

in the light of new ways of thinking about production (vertical gardening, hydroponics), and consumption (local niche foods and changing diets).

This is very sensitive to the scenario conditions of lifestyle and cultural change, employment / leisure, and land tenure, as well as planning policy and agricultural support.

Local social enterprise

The closures of post offices and bus services, and competition from large shopping malls, all point to the vital role of local social enterprise. This is often undermined in peri-urban areas, with large proportions of commuters and transient populations.

The LEADER and similar policy frameworks seek to address this through targeted funding packages. Again this could be very sensitive to future scenarios for social or economic change. One key issue is the role of local authorities in relation to social enterprise – will land and buildings be made available? Can the energy of the community be mobilized in a long lasting way? Are there more entrepreneurial forms of local governance which bridge the vital gaps in trust and knowledge between public, private and social sectors?

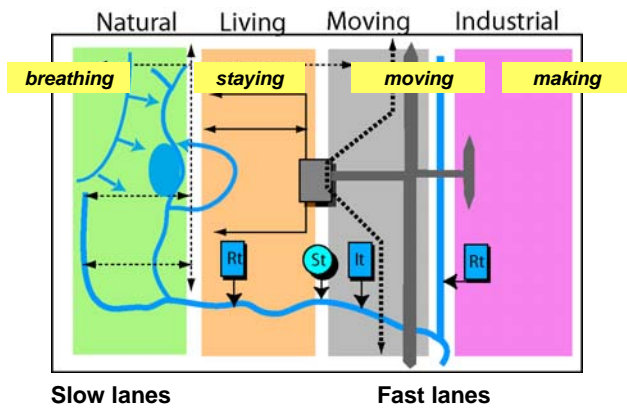
Overall policy questions

We can apply this testing process to policy issues in general:

- Will the policy be robust against future changes?
- Does the policy integrate with other policies?
- Is there coordination between public, private and civic sectors?
- Which are the winners, losers and unintended side effects?
- Does the policy encourage innovators and entrepreneurs?

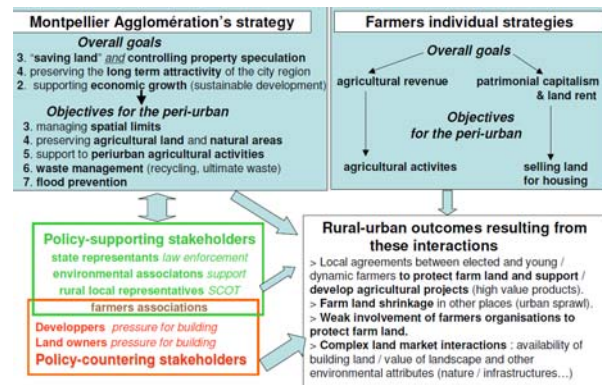
Peri-urban space-time thinking

Source: J. Jonkhof, Alterra, Wageningen, Netherlands



Peri-urban farming coordination strategy

Source: Buyck, J, Chery, J.P, Jarrige, F: PLUREL D3-3-2 (Montpellier)



Learning with Europe

A key benefit of the PLUREL project is the mutual exchange and learning between case studies around the EU (and including Hangzhou in China).

Some of the most significant lessons so far (at the midpoint in the project) are outlined here.

Blue-green infrastructure

In the Netherlands there is a long history of planning in harmony with water – there is little alternative when building below sea level. Every new development is started with a landscape master-plan based on blue-green infrastructure. This brings together ecological habitats and corridors, leisure and play areas, climate and flood protection, urban design qualities, and of course tends to raise house and property values. In the Haagland area in the Western Netherlands, such blue-green infrastructure is fitted closely alongside intensive horticulture in large areas of glass houses, in a climate similar to that of southern England.

Such integrated forms of master-planning can be set out in terms of space and time, as in the diagram above. 'Fast' spaces focus on the airports, motorways and communications. 'Slow' spaces focus on ecology, geology and landscape. Various forms of human settlement can then bridge between the fast and the slow in a layered structure.

Greening the shrinking city

The twin city of Leipzig-Halle suffered rapid depopulation, social change and investment withdrawal, following the re-unification of Germany. Under the title of the 'perforated city', many buildings and spaces were abandoned and derelict, and the shape of many urban and peri-urban communities was turned inside-out. Since then, a meticulous programme has been re-engineering, not only the physical urban and peri-urban space, but the connections to the economic and social activity around it.

Like other German cities with hot summers this also includes space for the summer houses and allotments in a ring around the urban area, enabling outdoor leisure and connection to the nearby forest for urban dwellers.

Peri-urban farming

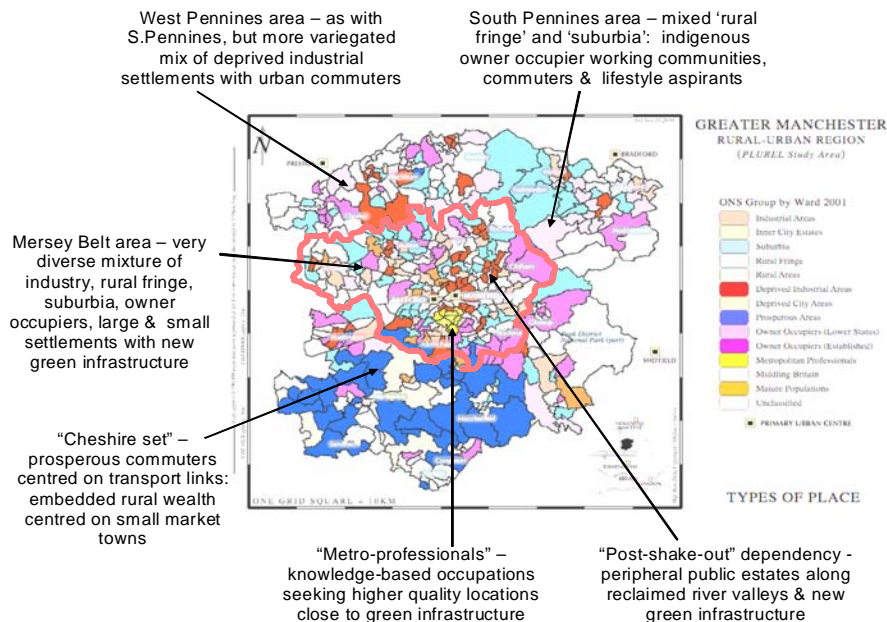
Montpellier has experienced rapid growth and rising values – strategic location, good climate, rich hinterland and adjacent to the coast. It has followed the French SCOT system of coordinated planning levels. This includes for an active programme of engagement with local farmers, who are experiencing their own social and economic changes. The results can be seen in the quality and local distinctiveness of French food.

Implications for Manchester

Drawing on these and more, we can point to some of the most significant success factors in new forms of peri-urban development.

How to mobilize and support the potential of social enterprise? Community land trusts are one way forward – linking a long term secure funding base with their interest groups. The German experience shows what is possible when working with a pro-active municipality.

How to mobilize local food as a productive use for urban and peri-urban green space? The Pennine social food projects are one way forward, but to go more mainstream they might share experiences with cities such as Montpellier.



PLUREL in Manchester

The Manchester city-region programme includes for technical analysis (above); policy analysis: and stakeholder consultation. This will help to highlight current trends, problems and opportunities of the new peri-urban geography of 21st century England.

We take a policy-scenario approach to current agendas and future possibilities over the next 40 years. This explores a series of 'what if' questions, such as -

- Will the urban fringe become more of a playground for the rich or a working environment?
- What are the likely effects of climate change on the green infrastructure, and what can we do to adapt to them?
- How to balance housing and business development in rural areas with landscape and ecological protection?
- Should the green belt be used for growing bio-mass energy crops or fresh food for the city?

The policy-scenario testing process then looks at current policies in the light of future possibilities.

Stakeholders

We are working with the organizations who are directly concerned with peri-urban issues. These represent a cross section of area types and economic drivers in the Manchester city-region:

- The South Pennine uplands – mixed industrial settlements, commuter towns, small scale agriculture, leisure and tourism.
- The Community Forest area – mixed industrial settlements, large urban infrastructure, pressure from housing and transport, multi-functional community forest.
- The strategic level and economic development agenda is represented by Manchester Enterprises and Manchester Knowledge Capital, a partnership agency for innovation and development.

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2. details on www.pennineprospects.co.uk
3. Scott, A.J. 2000. *The Cultural Economy of Cities: Essays on the Geography of Image-Producing Industries*. NY, Sage.
4. TEP Consultants with Natural England, 2008: Towards a Green Infrastructure Framework for Greater Manchester: AGMA
5. see www.incredible-edible-todmorden.com/

Case study programme

We are running a series of semi-structured interviews in each case study area. These work in parallel to technical data analysis and policy mapping.

- In 2008-9 we focus on the current **challenges and responses**.
- In 2009-10 we focus on the future **scenarios and opportunities**.
- There are multi-area workshops in early 2009 and 2010. These aim to share best practices, report results and build European links.
- We use a variety of methods, including an 'evocative' project with creative media based at MMU.

On June 28th 2010 these will be brought together and presented to the PLUREL international scientific conference, to be held in Manchester.

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