

BOOK REVIEW

Peter Nijkamp, Karima Kourtit, Adriana Kocornik-Mina (Eds),
Sustainable Villages and Green Landscapes in the 'New Urban World',
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Sustainable Villages and Green Landscapes in the 'New Urban World' is a collective volume seeking to bring into the spotlight the resilience of rural areas to the striking economic, social, environmental, cultural and demographic changes in the age of urbanity. With this aim in view, the editors – Peter Nijkamp, Karima Kourtit and Adriana Kocornik-Mina – have succeeded to bring together valuable contributions following an international workshop held in the Dutch village of Dalfsen, organised by the Regional Science Academy with the support of the Municipality of Dalfsen.

The thirteen chapters included in the volume offer a comprehensive image on both the challenges of a sustainable countryside and the challenges of “developing strong relationships with an urban mode of living and working” (p.11).

In Chapter 1, entitled “The New Countryside: An Exploratory Trend Analysis”, Peter Nijkamp and Karima Kourtit discuss the historical divide between cities and hinterland and argue that at present rural areas act as dynamic geographic regions, turning from monofunctional regions into mixed monofunctional ones. The authors convey a powerful message regarding the challenges that have to be faced by rural areas in this new context, which envisage the countryside sustainability and the clear orientation towards an urban mode of life and work.

Chapter 2, authored by Oskar Wolski, addresses concepts and processes that define the place of rural areas in regional development, pointing to the change in functions of rural areas in relation to their endogenous potential, supported by a “multi-level, multi-actor and multi-faceted process” (p.32).

In Chapter 3 – “Highlighting Smart Patterns in Rural Areas – Some Proposals” – André Torre and Frederic Wallet provide an assessment of the possibilities of applying smart development policies in rural areas. They are analysed in relation to the patterns of rural development and focus on the development of multifunctional agriculture, the support to innovation, the promotion of synergies between space and soil uses and the emphasis on ecologic, socio-economic processes and the mechanisms of territorial governance.

Chapter 4 concentrates on the rural and digital entrepreneurship linkages in the ‘New Urban Reality’. Its authors, Roger R. Stough and Shaoming Cheng, provide a review of the problems entailed by applying rural economic development strategies in relation to the limited access of rural individuals and entrepreneurs to knowledge on the one side and the opportunities offered by the digital milieu on the other side. The very interesting case study in India reveal various supporting options for rural entrepreneurship led economic development.

In Chapter 5 Daniel Czamanski and Dani Broitman highlight “Some Fundamentals of Near-Urban and Other Rurality” and propose an agent-based model which incorporates two partial models, with strong-like and weak-like forces, providing an explanation of “the dynamics of a system of settlements at a global level and at an individual urban system level” (p.73).

In Chapter 6 Oto Hudec and Monica Siserova discuss prosperity and vulnerability aspects regarding the rural areas of Slovakia, placing a strong emphasis on the quality of local and adaptive planning and management as a crucial condition for ensuring prosperity, sustainable development and resilience to the global challenges.

Chapter 7 – “‘Explore the Carpathian Garden’: prospects for Rural Tourism in Romania”, authored by Daniela-Luminita Constantin points to rural tourism as a relevant component of tourism industry in Romania starting from the country’s tourism destination brand, which suggests to those tourists interested in visiting unbeaten places the exploration of the Carpathians. The integration of the most important activities and attractions offered by rural tourism and the coordination of the adopted policy measures are considered basic keys for the success of this sector in Romania.

In Chapter 8 Abdellatif Khattabi, Said Lahssini, Abdenbi Zine El Abidine, Etienne Nduwayo and Sara Benbrahim present “Ecosystems Restoration as a Means of Preventing Adverse Climate Risks to Vulnerable Rural Villages in the High-Atlas Mountains of Morocco”. They analyse the response of rural communities of a mountainous region of Morocco to the impacts of climate change, revealing their vulnerable status and suggest the improvement of the prevention of climate risks by means of restoration, conservation and sustainable use of forest resources.

In Chapter 9 Umut Türk, Martina Dolciotti, John Östh, Aura Reggiani and Peter Nijkamp provide a comparative perspective with regard to the relationship between social capital and accessibility, migration and occupation, empirically applied in the case of Sweden. The results indicate a positive correlation between social capital and accessibility, occupational status and rurality.

In Chapter 10 Soushi Suzuki and Peter Nijkamp apply Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA) in order to trace the key success factors of urban tourism vs rural tourism. The novelty consists in the use of “Super-Efficiency DEA Model” for identifying without ambiguity high performers among the economic agents (tourist destinations).

Chapter 11 addresses rural-urban digital asymmetries in the emerging socio-technological landscape. Laurie Schintler and Connie McNeely show that these asymmetries in terms of transportation automation, artificial intelligence, crowdsourcing sensing, blockchain, internet, etc. depend on how, why and with what implications the connectedness is bound by societal stratification scheme.

In Chapter 12 Simona Panaro, Raffaele Attardi, Giuliano Poli and Maria Cerreta propose a landscape geographical collaborative approach based on a methodology incorporating a set of tools for multiscale landscape assessment, so as to integrate the multifunctional landscape concept into spatial planning processes at different territorial levels.

Finally, Chapter 13, co-authored by Anna Onesti and Paolo Franco Biancamano, aims to find a methodology able to operationalize the so-called HUL (Historic Urban Landscape) approach by means of a set of framework indicators. The conclusions suggest a reactivation of local development in line with its self-sustainable, regenerative and long-lasting attributes by the improvement of the circular functioning of the local economy via the systemic regeneration of landscape relationships.

The whole volume displays a variety of very insightful intellectual perspectives of the rural-urban relationship in the ‘New Urban World’, the richness of the ideas expressed making it a valuable framework for further debates in conceptual and methodological terms as well as a rich source of inspiration for the experts, policy-makers interested in applying a new, fresh vision with regard to the future of rural settlements development and their resilient behaviour.

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