

The Rural-Urban Interface in the Global South: Planning and Governance Challenges

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Abstract

The urban periphery in the Global South is a zone experiencing rapid and dynamic processes of change. The rural-urban interface is where urban and rural areas meet with the production of peri-urban spaces. These areas confront unique and acute problems and require distinctive innovative planning approaches and solutions to their complex challenges. As recreation and the tourism and hospitality sector can be critical components in peri-urban spaces it is essential that tourism scholars appreciate the broad changes occurring in these areas and their multiple challenges for planning and governance. This article provides a review of existing debates about peri-urban spaces in the Global South focused on their planning and governance challenges.

Keywords: rural-urban interface; peri-urban spaces; peri-urbanization; planning challenges; Global South

Introduction

The urban periphery of the Global South experiences some of the most dynamic processes of urbanization anywhere in the world (Follmann, 2022). At the rural-urban interface there exists “a peri-urban transition zone with mixed livelihoods and spatial uses and flows of people, goods, capital, information, natural resources, waste and pollution between urban and rural areas” (Ros-Tonen et al., 2015: 86). Peri-urban zones on the edge of urban settlement are important spaces “both in the sheer magnitude of human population and in terms of being home to vulnerable populations with high rates of poverty” (Hutchins et al., 2022: 924). For Wynne et al. (2020: 377) “peri-urban areas are the interface between rural and urban regions”. Although there is little scholarly consensus on what constitutes the ‘peri-urban’ “there is a broad agreement that the peri-urban is a dynamic, transitional area with a mix of urban and rural features located at the geographical fringe of cities” (Bartels et al., 2020: 1238). McGregor et al. (2006) point out that the rural-urban interfaces are zones where urban and rural areas meet and spaces that suffer from the greatest problems arising from rapid urbanization, including intense pressures on resources, growth of informal settlements, lack of adequate services such as water and sanitation, poor planning, and the degradation of agricultural land. These spaces “are subject to profound changes in their built environment, population and socio-economic activities” (Varkey & Manasi, 2019: 96). Indeed, in a global overview Scott et al. (2013) consider that the spaces where the countryside meets the urban are often amongst society’s most pressured places. Arguably, for McGregor et al. (2006) these peri-urban spaces, home to millions of people globally, confront unique and acute problems and require distinctive innovative planning approaches and solutions to their complex challenges.

Tourism and change is a critical international research focus (Saarinen & Rogerson, 2021). The tourism sector is one activity which can be greatly impacted by changes occurring at the rural-urban interface. In many peri-urban areas there exist important assets for the



activities of tourism, leisure and recreation. In many instances these spaces function as the ‘recreational periphery’ for metropolitan areas including, for example, for camping activities (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020a). In addition, these are spaces for the growth of different forms of tourism including leisure tourism, conference tourism, adventure tourism and wedding tourism. The development issues around tourism at the urban-rural interface have attracted the gaze of several scholars. Weaver and Lawton (2001, 2004) interrogate the attitudes of local residents towards tourism development in one community located in the rural-urban fringe of Australia’s Gold Coast. In Canada Fullerton and Brouder (2019) use the lens of evolutionary economic geography to dissect rural tourism in the metropolitan hinterland of Niagara Falls. Gao and Cheng (2020) consider the impact of the spill-over of leisure consumption demand in Chinese metropolitan areas for tourism-driven rural spatial restructuring. The tourism-led transformation of metropolitan fringe areas of several other Chinese cities has been tracked also by Liao and Chern (2015), Wei et al. (2018), Feng et al. (2020) and Zhang et al. (2022). In South Africa tourism development at the rural-urban interface has come under scrutiny with research conducted by tourism geographers isolating the sector’s vital role in local economic development and restructuring (Rogerson, 2007; Rogerson & van der Merwe, 2016; Rogerson & Visser, 2020). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic underlines further the importance for tourism researchers of understanding processes of change in the Global South that are reshaping the rural-urban interface (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021a). In South African research it has been disclosed that ‘rural fringe’ localities have been beneficiaries of changing consumer preferences triggered by the pandemic as travellers increasingly are in search of open spaces, nature and of less congested environments (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020b, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b).

It is against this backdrop that the aim in this paper is to provide a synthesis of extant international debates concerning the planning and governance challenges of the rural-urban interface. The approach is through a literature review which was informed by a search in scientific data bases (most importantly Google Scholar) for relevant literature on the rural-urban interface undertaken for the post-2000 period using the contents of leading serials of urban studies, geography and planning as well as relevant contributions in edited academic collections. The search was confined to English-language based publications. The objective of this work is informed by the viewpoint that “a review of past research efforts is an important endeavour in all academic research areas” (Nunkoo et al., 2013: 5). For tourism and hospitality scholars such a review can inform our understanding of the challenges that confront tourism enterprises and development at the rapidly changing urban periphery in the Global South. Three sections of review and discussion are presented. The first examines conceptual issues around the rural-urban interface, peri-urban and peri-urbanization processes. The second turns to planning challenges in these spaces. The third focuses on governance issues.

The peri-urban interface – A critical spatial zone in the urban Global South

Among others Simon (2008: 167) argues that conventionally social scientists and policy-makers concerned with the nexus between urban areas and their rural hinterlands relied on a simple urban-rural dichotomy. It was contended that implicit in this urban-rural dichotomization of space is “the idea that urban and rural areas were characterized by very different land-use patterns and human behaviors and that the boundaries between these spaces and places were easily discernible and clear-cut” (Simon, 2008: 167). Usually distinctions were made between urban and rural spaces which “assume reducibility of the livelihoods or their inhabitants to two main categories agriculture-based in rural areas, and manufacture and services in urban centres” (Allen, 2010: 32). The recent urbanization experiences of much of Asia and Latin America, however, do not support this neat categorization. The complex

dynamics of urbanization in these areas are such that ‘rural’ and ‘agricultural’ do not necessarily overlap and that the conflation between urban and industrial is challenged by the increased mixing of farming and non-farming activities amongst both the urban and rural poor.

New conceptual landscapes have appeared wherein rural-urban linkages are redefined (Adell, 1999). In pathbreaking research undertaken in the 1990s McGee (1991), McGee and Greenberg (1992) and Ginsburg et al. (1991) observed the rise of the so-termed ‘extended metropolitan regions’ or *desakota* regions of Asia which are spaces characterized by rapid growth and the spreading of urban activities into rural areas. *Desakota* are “regions in between” and refer to “closely interlinked rural/urban livelihoods, communication, transport and economic systems” (Moench & Gyawali, 2008: 2). This creates, as Simon (2008) notes, complex mosaics of juxtaposed activities which formerly were regarded as incompatible such as leisure-oriented golf courses proximate to rural villages. A number of writers have observed the *desakota* phenomenon in fast expanding metropolitan areas of Asia (Firman & Dhatmapatni, 1995; Kelly, 1999; McGee, 2022; McGee & Greenberg, 1992; Rustiadi et al., 2015). In addition, both Simon (2008) and Allen (2010) draw attention to a long history of intense integration of urban Latin America into the global economy which has produced comparable forms of “urban archipelago” to *desakota* regions and which are denoted by diffuse boundaries and weakened official controls. Overall, therefore, the urbanization process in the global South is being re-examined and re-conceptualised in light of new “emerging landscapes that challenge conventional definitions and perceptions of the city and countryside regarding location, physical structure, functional relation, institutional context and cultural outlook” (Allen, 2010: 32). Within sub-Saharan Africa the work of Chirisa (2010) is notable for highlighting the significance of economically and socially marginal peri-urban zones which sometimes are de-coupled from economic development.

Several authors point out therefore that basing planning and policy-making on the rural-urban dichotomy is increasingly inadequate (Follmann, 2022; Marshall et al., 2009). Allen (2010: 31) maintains that across the Global South a dramatic urban transition is under way albeit “not necessarily a transition to full urban status in which urbanization spreads transforming the countryside”; rather what is occurring is best described as “a process of intensification of mutual rural-urban interactions leading to a still poorly understood spatial, socio-cultural, demographic, economic and environmental realities”. The ‘rural-urban dichotomy’ appears unable to account for emerging territorial landscapes in the Global South “where the geographical borders of rural and urban intermingle to such a degree that distinguishing between them is difficult” (Allen, 2010: 31). Accordingly, among development professionals and policymakers there emerged a growing recognition of the fact that rural and urban features tend to increasingly coexist within cities and that the urban-rural dichotomy which is so deeply ingrained in most planning systems is unable to deal with processes of contemporary urban change (Allen et al., 2006a).

In seeking to address conceptually the new emerging landscapes of urban development across the Global South there is increasing acceptance of ‘peri-urban’ as the best descriptor for areas that have mixed urban and rural features. Amirinejad et al. (2018) maintain that peri-urban areas exhibit a complex set of land use relationships that make up the fluid phenomenon of peri-urbanization. The concept of peri-urbanization has recently earned a great deal of academic attention (Ahani & Dadashpoor, 2021; Dadashpoor & Ahani, 2019, 2021; Follmann, 2022; Singh & Narain, 2020). Peri-urban areas are by nature complex, multifaceted spaces and as a result the literature on these areas derives from numerous disciplines (Hutchings et al., 2022). Bartels et al. (2020: 1238) observe that in recent years “there has been a remarkable increase in scholarly attention to processes of peri-urbanisation and in particular to peri-urban spaces”. According to Amirinejad et al. (2018) peri-urban areas represent “ambiguous” spaces

as being neither urban nor rural in the conventional sense. Indeed, notwithstanding that the term peri-urban is contested and subject to different interpretations and meanings Woltjer (2014) considers that the terminology of ‘peri-urban’ areas captures the challenges of where urban and rural life meets.

The term peri-urban is “fraught with conceptual uncertainties” (Bartels et al. 2020: 1242) as it variously has been applied to designate a place, a concept and a process. Allen (2003: 136) maintains that the peri-urban interface constitutes an “uneasy phenomenon” which is usually marked by either the loss of ‘rural’ aspects (loss of fertile soil, agricultural land, natural landscape) or the absence of ‘urban’ attributes. At its heart the peri-urban is conceptualized as a heterogeneous mix of urban and rural features. Simon (2008: 167) views peri-urban zones as transitional zones between distinctly urban and clearly rural areas and argues that their significance lies in the fact that “their dynamic mix of functions and land uses; increasing population densities; growing significance as sources of urban food, construction materials, and other resources; as urban waste disposal or treatment sites; and as recreational zones”.

Peri-urbanization describes the range of different multi-faceted processes that transform rural spaces to a mix of rural and urban landscapes (Follmann, 2022). Allen (2010: 35) writes of the peri-urban interface as neither urban nor rural and from an ecological perspective represents “an interface or heterogeneous mosaic of natural, productive or agro-ecosystems and urban ecosystems, affected by material and energy flows demanded by urban and rural systems”. This spatial zone is particularly distinctive for the multiple challenges it poses for planning and governance “because of its ecological features, socio-economic heterogeneity and fragmented institutional context”. In socio-economic terms the interface is mixed, fluid and subject to rapid change with the co-existence potentially of informal households, industrial entrepreneurs, and new migrants all with different and competing interests/perceptions within an institutional context of the absence of structures capable of addressing the linkages between so-termed urban and rural activities (Allen, 2010; Allen et al., 2006a). Among others, Marshall et al. (2009) and Follmann (2022) pinpoint the dynamic and shifting nature of the peri-urban phenomenon. Arguably, whilst the precise location of the peri-urban interface will shift constantly over time, the general phenomenon of peri-urban spaces and process of peri-urbanisation will remain a constant (Simon et al., 2004).

According to Scott et al. (2013: 1) peri-urban spaces are often zones of disintegrated development with ‘messy’ yet opportunistic spaces in policy and planning decision-making processes (Scott et al., 2013: 1). For the urban Global South the planning challenges related to peri-urban development are pressing contemporary issues for decision-makers. In particular, what Allen (2010: 35) calls, the “shifting nature” of the peri-urban interface offers a suite of planning challenges which must be addressed. The following sections turn to examine the international literature and debates around the planning and governance challenges posed by the peri-urban interface.

Planning challenges

Arguably the planning challenges around the rural-urban interface are complex and not always understood. As far back as the 1940s the geographer Wehrwein (1942: 217) drew attention to problems in transition zones such as the rural-urban fringe, a space that for administrators and policy-makers represented a “twilight zone”. At the outset, in relation to planning challenges, the contemporary international literature stresses that peri-urban interface zones are not independent or isolated zones; rather they must be comprehended as dynamic and fluid interfaces between urban and rural relations (Simon, 2008). From a wide range of international scholarship, it is evidenced that the peri-urban zone represents “a highly dynamic and complex



system of land use”, which exhibits the characteristics of an ecological and socio-economic interface (Allen et al., 1999). This said, it is clear, as stressed by Thapa et al. (2010: 29) from a review of the international record, that the “dynamics of the peri-urban interface are not well understood, and there is a lack of analytical and management approaches to address key problems”. In one study conducted on peri-urban zones in China Sun (2012) maintains that international scholarship on peri-urban zones focuses on two major issues, namely, (1) socio-economic issues around poverty and (2) environmental issues around pollution and land degradation. Other critical challenges and opportunities regarding the urban-rural interface concern the urgency to find solutions on the preservation and management of open spaces and recreation areas (Ros-Tonen et al., 2015), the latter being of special concern for tourism planning.

The peri-urban interface is a space that is impacted by urban expansion which can result in new economic opportunities, such as land speculation, but often at high environmental costs because of the lessening of essential ecological functions such as recycling of nutrients or replenishment of aquifers (Allen et al., 1999). Sun (2012: 27) observes that in many cases environmentally protected areas, such as watersheds, can be severely impacted by the character of urban expansion such that “the loss of singular and habitat and biodiversity in these areas is often irreparable”. In these areas the management of natural resources is crucial as the peri-urban interface “plays an essential role in the provision of water to nearby urban and rural areas” not least because the interface is often the location of water supply facilities such as reservoirs (Allen et al., 2006a: 21). The mismanagement of water resources is a significant underpinning of ecological, economic, and social problems around the use of water for economic or household purposes (Allen et al., 1999: 17). Further, there is often an added pressure on existing ecosystems and hydrological regimes with, for example, the replacement of natural soil and vegetation by artificial impermeable surfaces (Allen et al., 1999).

According to Ros-Tonen et al. (2015) among the most pressing challenges at the rural-urban interface are those surrounding socio-economic inequalities, the processes that drive their exacerbation, and the imperative to stimulate “integrated, sustainable and multifunctional landscapes with an intrinsic potential for positive, social, economic and environmental change” (Ros-Tonen et al., 2015: 93). Likewise, Bartels et al. (2020: 1237) highlight what they term “uneven peri-urbanisation as a process in which access to the resources mobilised for peri-urban developments, such as water or land, is rendered uneven”. Conflicts emerge between numerous stakeholders over land and access to environmental resources such as water (McGregor et al., 2006). Land conversion from fields to urban housing can have severe consequences for poorer inhabitants (Simon, 2008; Bartels, 2020). It is suggested that under certain circumstances rapid land use changes witnessed in the peri-urban interface may precipitate an actual scarcity of land and a “dearth of agricultural by-products such as fuel and fodder making them less available to the peri-urban poor” (Allen et al., 2006a: 22). According to Simon (2008) the process by which land conversion occurs at the peri-urban interface is impacted by local institutional structures, land tenure systems and especially by the relative power of key stakeholders. In the context of Africa as well as parts of Asia peri-urban land often falls under the aegis of communal tenure and traditional structures. Around the peri-urban interface the dynamics of land use changes are driven by external decisions such as the construction of new roads, dams or commercial property developments (Allen et al., 1999). In particular, in the context of the extended metropolitan regions of Asia Woltjer (2014) highlights the role of global capital and of foreign direct investment as a driving force in the dynamics of peri-urbanisation and changes in peri-urban spaces. Inequalities therefore are produced and reproduced in peri-urban spaces as for example when peri-urban farmers lose access to water in order to supply the water needs of cities or farmers lose access to both land and water to

urban elites who construct houses in peri-urban locales (Bartels et al, 2020). If policy makers, therefore, overlook the phenomenon of peri-urbanisation they disregard the inequalities which exists and can be worsening in peri-urban spaces (Bartels et al., 2020: 1238)

Follmann (2022) and Follmann et al. (2022) point out that with the complex transformations occurring in peri-urban spaces around land use change, shifting economic activities (including tourism) and changing resource flows there are competing claims to the same space and resources which can generate multi-faceted socio-spatial and socio-ecological conflicts. Land values and ownership commonly are impacted by rapid changes which can result in growing numbers of landless people as well as clashes between customary land management systems and market-driven land systems. Thapa et al. (2010) draw attention to accompanying issues of increased social exclusion. Often so-termed ‘traditional natural management systems’ can be disrupted as extractive activities (such as brickmaking) are intensified and deforestation may be evidenced. Allen et al (1999: 20) identify the peri-urban interface as “the prime area subjected to extraction of construction materials, which results in increasing natural resource depletion”. Within the *desakota* regions of Asia traditional systems for forest, water and other natural resource management are under stress and in many cases are breaking down (Moench & Gyawalai, 2008: 5). Environmental degradation, therefore, is a commonly observed phenomenon of the peri-urban interface (Thapa et al., 2010). In particular Simon (2008) draws attention to the fact that environmental issues figure prominently in the process of peri-urbanization and of the planning challenges of the peri-urban interface across the Global South. Allen et al. (1999: 21) assert that “usually urban wastes are legally or illegally disposed of in the peri-urban interface, often surpassing the absorptive capacity of these areas and having severe impacts on the health of the ecosystems and the population”. The widespread location of polluting infrastructure is flagged by Simon (2008) as causing negative externalities for local communities in peri-urban areas.

In parallel with the above, it is often the case that traditional productive activities are eroded and wiped out which again impacts negatively upon livelihoods especially of the poor (Allen et al., 1999). For Simon (2008) land use conflicts in the peri-urban environment and accompanying changes in traditional livelihoods are viewed as almost inevitable. As a consequence, livelihood strategies necessarily tend to be denoted by a mixture of natural and non-nature based activities (Allen et al., 1999). As compared to the urban or rural poor the livelihoods of the peri-urban poor are more likely to hinge on both natural and non-nature and resources-based productive activities (Allen, 2003: 345). Within the distinctive setting of the *desakota* regions of Asia both McGee (1991, 2022) and Moench and Gyawali (2008) show that large sections of the population operate a mixed household economy that straddles formal and informal sectors.

Agriculture is a vital source of livelihood at the peri-urban interface of cities in the Global South (Spataru et al., 2022; Thapa & Murayama, 2008; Torres-Lima et al., 2010; Wynne et al., 2020). Peri-urban agriculturalists confront a multitude of challenges in adapting their production systems to a context of environmental degradation (Losada et al., 1998). More particularly the activity of peri-urban cultivation becomes precarious when the likelihood of land sale and conversion to urban development is heightened (Torres-Lima et al., 2010). Peri-urban cultivators face further difficulties from land degradation and environmental deterioration which can impact upon quality of water resources used in irrigation. As Cofie et al. (2003: 9) argue whereas peri-urban agriculture “could play a positive role in the urban ecological system, it is most exposed to the urban footprint and environmental pollution, compared with other farming systems”. A significant challenge relates to the negative impact on food contamination as it has been documented for sub-Saharan Africa that vegetables produced at the peri-urban interface often are highly contaminated with pathogens because of

the utilisation of polluted streams and drain water for irrigation purposes (Cofie et al., 2003). Commonly these areas are the location for the emergence of unregulated or ‘informal’ activities which can include, *inter alia*, the application of raw organic wastes in cultivation of certain crops (especially vegetables), the proliferation of extractive activities for producing construction materials, the deposition of toxic wastes and open site dumping and even the establishment of unregulated abattoirs (Allen et al., 2006a).

Usually the peri-urban interface is characterized by inadequate provision of services and infrastructure, including water supplies, sanitation, electricity, drainage, paved roads and refuse systems (Aguilar & Lopez, 2009; Allen et al., 2006b; Hoffmann, 2011). In a multi-country investigation Allen et al. (2004, 2006a, 2006b) pinpoint the water and sanitation needs of the peri-urban water poor. It is stressed that their needs “are not being met either by conventional approaches such as the expansion of networked public utilities nor through formal large-scale private sector companies” (Allen et al., 2006b: 334). Instead, they maintain that the needs of the peri-urban poor are addressed “through a dizzying array of non-conventional and often officially unrecognized means such as informal operators, privately operated wells, gifts from neighbours, rainwater harvesting and clandestine connections” (Allen et al., 2006b: 334).

As a byproduct of infrastructural shortcomings as well as environmental degradation and inadequate regulation, the peri-urban interface often is vulnerable and susceptible to disease and contamination (Sun, 2012). Allen et al. (2004: 18) flag that in light of the poor infrastructural services that “these areas are affected by a number of water and sanitation related diseases including diarrhea, intestinal worms, typhoid, cholera and dysentery, with the poor being most exposed and disadvantaged”. In particular, the work of Chirisa (2010: 16) is relevant for pinpointing that the “peri-urban interfaces in almost all the developing countries are places of possible disease outbreaks”. In the context of sub-Saharan Africa in particular, attention is drawn to several peri-urban spaces which “experience high incidences of waterborne, airborne and other pandemic diseases” (Chirisa, 2010: 25). Further, Woltjer (2014: 7) confirms that in sub-Saharan Africa “peri-urban zones are prospective places for disease and other social hazards due to their general lack of planning and institutional integration”. The deficit in infrastructural facilities at the peri-urban interface is not simply in terms of water and sanitation, refuse removal or electricity which attract the greatest attention. Among others Chirisa (2010: 17) underscores the absence in these areas of an appropriate social infrastructure in terms of community facilities, such as halls, libraries or sports grounds, the availability of which it is said might mitigate the effects of the “cultural rupture” as observed in peri-urban environments.

Above all, the peri-urban interface confronts challenges which relate to questions of sustainability (Marshall et al., 2009; McGregor et al., 2006). Allen et al. (2006a) draw attention to the problematic of the existence of a mosaic of environmental and productive systems which necessarily must function amidst competing interests between different groups or classes of people. In particular, this heterogeneous mosaic of ecosystems is strongly influenced by the material and energy flows demanded particularly by the urban system (Allen, 2003: 137). In relation to sustainability one often overlooked issue relates to the broader role assumed by ‘green spaces’ within urban socio-ecological systems to ameliorate the problems of rapid urban development (Mensah, 2014; Singh et al., 2010). The loss of natural vegetation and forests in peri-urban areas undermines the potential valuable role that these areas can assume in respect of preservation of biodiversity, carbon storage as well as offering potential recreational spaces. For the Global South these issues are explored in a number of recent contributions (Budrick et al., 2009; Jim & Chen, 2006a, 2006b; Krellenberg et al., 2014; Singh et al., 2010), including for sub-Saharan Africa (Mensah, 2014). As a whole, it is argued that sustainable cities cannot be designed without green spaces and a recognition of their critical multiple roles in urban-

regional ecological systems. Among these roles the most important concern “climate change mitigation, pollution abatement, biodiversity conservation and provisioning of the ecosystem goods and services to urban inhabitants” (Singh et al., 2010: 6).

Governance challenges

With projections that by 2050 70 percent of the global population will reside in metropolitan regions critical governance challenges relate to rural-urban interfaces (Ros-Tonen et al., 2015). Nevertheless, according to Ros-Tonen et al. (2015: 86) “little has been written about how to govern the urban-rural interface”. In many countries peri-urban spaces are politically marginal as policy-makers and decision-makers sometimes view these areas (incorrectly) as ‘transitional’ or temporary (Bartels et al., 2020).

Allen et al. (1999: 6) point out that a distinguishing dimension of the peri-urban interface is the absence “of institutions capable of addressing the links between urban and rural activities”. Woltjer (2014: 9) views government capacity for dealing with issues around peri-urban development, both in terms of financial and human capital, as “generally deficient”. Poor management of these areas is attributed to “the convergence of sectoral and overlapping institutions with different remits” (Allen et al., 1999: 6) with the absence of institutional structures that bridge urban and rural areas and address specifically the challenges of peri-urban spaces. Critically, in many countries “peri-urban spaces frequently fall between responsibilities of several government departments and agencies that are often divided between urban and rural areas, which further pushes peri-urban spaces onto the political margins” (Bartels et al., 2020: 1238). For Chirisa (2010: 18) the administration of the peri-urban interface “is often chaotic hence synonymous with disharmony, duality and conflict”. It is observed that across the experience of the Global South governance in the peri-urban interface tends to be severely fragmented, with a multitude of actors and no single organization providing guidance or leadership (Allen et al., 2006a). The unfortunate consequence as is noted by Chirisa (2010: 21) often is that peri-urban areas become characterized by “administrative impasses and in this situation the poor are caught up in the crossfire when local authorities are reluctant to account or take pro-poor initiatives”.

Across several investigations the planning implications of the plight of the very poorest households at the peri-urban interface is profiled as at the heart of planning (Allen, 2003; Chirisa, 2010; Simon, 2008). Allen (2003: 344) contends that - as compared to the urban or rural poor - the peri-urban poor “may live in the ‘worst of both worlds’, as they are often exposed to a combination of rural and urban health hazards”. According to Allen (2010: 41) one condition that clearly sets apart the peri-urban poor from their urban or rural counterparts is that “their living environments tend to be closely associated with marginal environments sited in and/or around negative externalities”. Elsewhere it is confirmed that the poorest households experience high insecurity, limited incomes, insecure tenure and yet reduced access to environmental resources upon which often livelihoods and survival are dependent (Allen et al., 2006b). The conditions of the very poorest “are compounded by extremely inadequate water and sanitation arrangements, overcrowding, exposure to biological and chemical threats and a lack of access to health services” (Marshall et al., 2009: 11). This situation underlines for Thapa et al (2010) the rationale to build a suite of initiatives in order to support resilience in a context of high natural capital which is combined with high levels and often worsening poverty.

The call is made for new restructured planning and management frameworks “that will tackle poverty alleviation and social justice alongside environmental integrity” (Sun, 2012: 27). Simon (2008) avers that the planning and governance challenges of the peri-urban interface need to be approached from the perspective that these areas form an integral part of the functional urban area and the ecological footprint. Likewise, Allen et al (1999: 38) suggest that

the environmental problems of the poor in the peri-urban interface cannot be dealt with in a localized solution but instead must be viewed in consideration of the sustainability of the broader “urban bioregion”. In Asia attention has been given to encouraging the development and penetration of “environmentally benign” energy systems as a key avenue for alleviating poverty and of addressing certain negative effects of current trajectories of development upon local ecosystems (Moench & Gyawali, 2008: 24). Within the setting of Africa given the dangers associated with peri-urban zones and disaster outbreaks it has been argued that planning and governance potentially needs to be framed within the discourse of sustainable development and of sustainable healthy cities (Chirisa, 2010).

In terms of transcending the observed inadequacies of the rural-urban dichotomy it is contended that planning and governance systems must adjust to the problems which are experienced at the peri-urban interface (Anane & Cobbinah, 2022). Arguably, however, the “dominant planning and formal management decisions are often based on particular framings, inadequate information and limited recognition of peri-urban dynamics” (Marshall et al., 2009: 50). For Chirisa (2010: 16) this demands that “policymakers, projects’ implementers, planners and communities therein change their perceptions and attitudes about peri-urban interfaces”. Allen (2003: 135) avers that “environmental planning and management in the peri-urban interface cannot simply be based on the extrapolation of planning approaches and tools applied in rural and urban areas”. Rather, as Marshall et al. (2009: 10) contend, peri-urban planning demands “a unique approach which draws together elements of rural, regional and urban planning”. Arguably, there is consensus that peri-urban areas should not be allowed to develop spontaneously or in haphazard fashion and that instead a “pro-active mind” is needed (Chirisa, 2010: 16).

The limits of conventional urban planning approaches are forwarded by Allen (2003). It is pointed out that urban planning generally focuses on integrating the peri-urban into the urban variously through infrastructural provision (water, electricity, roads, sanitation), the implementation of development projects which might include micro-finance, and through participatory approaches. The results of such interventions are critiqued as being outside of mainstream decision-making by governments with the consequence that the results are “marginal” for development, not least because of power relations and the tendency for urban policy to prioritise the interests of the urban elite over the poor. Correspondingly, the limitations of a rural environmental planning focus are exposed (Marshall et al., 2009). It is stressed that often such approaches are targeted to enhance rural lives and infrastructure by addressing localized problems. Nevertheless, what this fails to do is to take on board a longer-term perspective which would consider regional and urban environmental planning dimensions. The approach of regional planning is viewed as preferable as it encourages “a shared understanding of rural and urban issues and to move away from the very localized rural planning approach by developing and supporting networks and relationships between rural and urban areas” (Marshall et al., 2009: 10). The need for greater regional planning is given further credence also in work by Chirisa (2010) in the context of sub-Saharan Africa. Arguably, it is stated that “should regional planning be esteemed and practiced in Africa a host of the peri-urban challenges could have been avoided” (Chirisa, 2010: 24).

Attention is drawn to the observed situation across the Global South that many urban mayors and their administrations exhibit little if any commitment to addressing the fundamental challenges of the peri-urban zones and its residents. This lack of political will is viewed as the result of an “urban orientation” or bias. Marshall et al. (2009: 50) concur that priorities “are set largely on the basis of economic growth parameters and under the influence of a limited number of powerful urban interest groups”. Correspondingly, alternative planning perspectives based on practices of on the ground, entitlements or resource conflicts within

rapidly changing environments are generally ignored. Accordingly, the need exists for changing the mindset of senior administrators and decision-makers and this potentially can be most effectively achieved by demonstrating through evidence-based research the web of interrelationships that bind together the environmental and socio-economic fortunes of the core urban with the peri-urban interface (Follmann, 2022).

It is recommended by Allen (2003: 142) that the management of peri-urban areas and especially environmental planning “requires a combination of methods that strike a balance between local planning (paying particular attention to the heterogeneity of and power relations within peri-urban communities) and the broader dimension of urban regional planning”. In order to enhance food security and to protect ecosystem services Ros-Tonen et al. (2015) propose the framework of integrated urban-rural governance. In terms of thinking and acting strategically with respect to the challenges of the peri-urban interface Allen (2003: 142) suggests that management and environmental planning must search “to create a balance between the formulation of long-term, cross-sectoral and dynamic strategies and short-term interventions”. It is added this differs from other approaches to urban planning and management “in so far as it does not attempt to intervene on all issues but focuses on interventions with synergetic potential” (Allen, 2003: 142). For Marshall et al. (2009) this requires that environmental planning should be inclusive and participatory to the extent that it engages with a broad range of actors/stakeholders whose mandate might focus on rural, urban, regional or even national level initiatives. Further it is recommended that planning should be centred on natural ecosystems that cross urban and rural spaces and seek to build new forms of collaborative relationship between the rural and the urban (Allen, 2003; Marshall et al., 2009). Allen et al. (1999: 38) caution that in the absence of the institutional fora “neither the brown agenda priorities of peri-urban communities, nor the longer-term issues affecting the sustainability of the city region are likely to be addressed by municipal authorities”.

Questions of social justice and notions of sustainability are viewed as generally missing from peri-urban planning yet must be inserted in such a fashion that pro-poor initiatives can be coupled with pro-environment initiatives (Follmann, 2022). In order to evolve policy and management systems for peri-urban zones Marshall et al. (2009: 10-11) maintain that “it is necessary for local, environmental, urban and regional planning needs to be addressed and balanced against each other”. Of necessity this balancing act demands an acknowledgement of structural power relationships and careful consideration of how different ecological processes play out and in final analysis would require the making of broader inter-sectoral and more plural scales of governance. Simon (2008) and Bartels et al. (2020) offer different perspectives for planning and governance. First, it is highlighted that effective planning requires adequate and appropriate levels of local authority and metropolitan capacity as well as resources which in much of the Global South are in short supply. Second, it is recognized that the dynamic nature of the peri-urban interface demands a flexibility of planning mechanisms and institutions and that a different balance between permissive and restrictive forms of planning may be required. This said, it is emphasized by other scholars a critical planning issue that must not be overlooked is the participation of the poor themselves both in the identification of planning priorities and decision-making. For Allen et al. (1999: 39) the latter represents “a central element in the relationship between sustainability, poverty, environment and health”.

Finally, it is essential to reiterate the glaring knowledge deficit that surrounds livelihoods and the dynamics of communities at the peri-urban interface. Among others Allen et al. (1999) and Follmann (2022) underscore the need for further evidenced-based research in order to inform policymaking. In particular, the scholarship imperative is to unpack and comprehend the dynamism of the peri-urban interface and its relationships with the wider urban landscape and system (Bartels et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The rural-urban interface is a critical space in the landscape of the Global South. The analysis reveals key problems with applying the urban-rural dichotomy as a basis for comprehending the dynamics of change occurring at the rural-urban interface and to inform planning for these spaces. The international literature reveals the validity of the terminology of the peri-urban interface as a useful starting point for unpacking the dynamics of change in ‘transitional’ spaces where urban and rural features are interwoven (Bartels et al., 2020; Follmann et al., 2022). The peri-urban interface is distinctive for the multiple challenges that it offers to planners because of its rapid pace of change, ecological and socio-economic features and usually fragmented institutional context. As argued by Follmann (2022: 4) “peri-urban research foregrounds the need to question (and rethink) foundational concepts” such as urban and rural. This said, the term peri-urbanization often is applied now as a shorthand expression to capture the complex transformations which are taking place at the urban periphery throughout the Global South (Follmann, 2022).

Ros-Tonen et al. (2015) point out that globalization and urbanization impacts increase the complexity of the urban-rural interface and affect the character and extent of asset flows between urban and rural spaces. The threat exists that increasing demand for natural resources and competing claims affecting land, water, vegetation cover, and natural resources risk exclusion and marginalization of vulnerable communities (Follmann, 2022). None the less, a dynamic peri-urban fringe might also offer new opportunities if planning and governance challenges relating to these critical spaces can be appropriately addressed. This review of international research revealed several critical planning and governance related issues that require scrutiny and policy attention. For many scholars there is an imperative to evolve new restructured planning and management frameworks in order to address the challenges of the peri-urban interface. Potential recommended best pathways for new governance relate to the need to shift planning away from localized solutions to instead consider broader regional frameworks as well as to pivot away from an extrapolation of planning approaches or tools applied in traditional urban or rural planning. The specific issues of peri-urban zones require a regional approach in order to address complex poverty and environmental challenges especially within the context of sustainability objectives and a search for social justice. Further, a critical finding from the international literature is that detailed research and monitoring is required of the peri-urban interface zones in order to understand the dynamics of change in these areas and to interpret relationships with the wider urban system.

One element of that research agenda must be to understand the impacts of these changes occurring in these dynamic spaces for opportunities in the tourism and hospitality sector. The ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa reveal a window of potential for boosting tourism development in peri-urban spaces. Arguably, therefore, greater attention is merited by African tourism scholars to comprehend the processes of peri-urbanization which are continually reshaping the rural-urban interface across the Global South and impacting the environment for tourism and recreation.

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