

The Urban-Rural Interface: Recent Concepts and Changes. The Case of Buenos Aires

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Abstract

As the city advances on its hinterland, new concepts emerge to highlight the urban-rural relations that take place in the areas where the urban and the rural systems are articulated. This paper takes up different concepts and their characteristics as well as a comprehensive individualization of the Buenos Aires urban-rural interface (UR-I). The paper aims to characterize the UR-I of Buenos Aires through a qualitative methodology. The paper analyses some preliminary discussions that allow us to establish the emergence of new logics of localization and shaping of the industries and logistics centres, large leisure and consumption facilities and the new ways of living, as well as the issue of the productive Buenos Aires UR-I, and invites us to review the territorial processes, the actors and the underlying factors in Buenos Aires.

Introduction

As urbanization advances in rural areas, some new concepts emerge to explain how the UR-I spaces are being occupied and reorganized [1]. In the first cities, a limit between the urban and the rural is established to create a closed structure capable of gathering within it the features that in the villages are spread over the territory. Afterwards, in the garden cities, a limit is established to curb urban growth. Nowadays, this territory is formed as a space with its own features, which articulate the urban and the rural systems [2]–[6].

These spaces of articulation between the urban and the rural systems may receive different names, such as peri-urban environment, urban-rural ecotone, urban-rural continuum, diffuse zone, peri-urban space, etc. These concepts imply that these spaces are static or that there is a hierarchy between the urban and the rural. However, the term UR-I evokes the idea of a dynamic space which, like the urban and the rural, is shaped in time and within the territory [7].

UR-I spaces constitute a new kind of geography of urban expansion [5], [8]. In these territories, urban and rural

relations take place in different scales and ways, which are juxtaposed, creating conflicts between the urban interests as well as the rural ones [9], [10].

In this sense, institutions do not always provide efficient responses to solve the multifunctionality of the UR-I spaces [11], and Buenos Aires is no exception. So that institutions may design that space to suit their reality, this paper aims to characterize the UR-I of Buenos Aires through a qualitative methodology. This paper takes up different concepts and their characteristics, as well as a comprehensive individualization of the Buenos Aires urban-rural interface (UR-I), in order to discuss some preliminary reflections. The materials do not constitute a lineal sequence because the different views overlap. In this respect, the working hypothesis that establishes the classification is exploratory.

I. The UR-I as a Concept

In the mid-20th century, the distinction between the urban and the rural vanished. In Europe, the urban dispersion tried to atomize in a different way to keep a

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Fig. 1. New Town, Northampton, England [61].

clear and defined UR-I, the New Towns (Fig. 1) and the *Villes Nouvelles* being the most paradigmatic cases. In the United States, on the other hand, this dispersion is interpreted as an opportunity to guide the location of activities and people in the UR-I, and it is related to the means of transport. In the beginning, there was a residential and industrial prevalence [12]. Then, when the metropolitan trains appeared, suburban units grew [13], as well as spaces for consumption. Later on, with the appearance of the car, new residential spaces were generated further away [14]. Transport and communication innovations reduced the distances, the time, and the cost of production, making new agglomerations and polarizations possible [15], [16].

In this sense, in 1955, Sectorsky proposed the term *exurbia* to describe the traditions of the upper classes which migrated towards the outskirts of New York city. Later, in the 60s, Gottmann [17] exposed the appearance of large areas in the West Coast of the United States as well as in Los Angeles, Chicago, Ohio and the Great Lakes area, which concentrated population and industrial and commercial, financial and cultural equipment in places that he called “megapolis” (Fig. 2). This notion acquired by the UR-I is reflected in Europe under the concept of “city-region” introduced by Giancarlo de Carlo [18].

The suburban areas changed from bedroom communities to concentrations of offices, shopping centres, and entertainment areas [19], [20]. In this context, the demographic studies conducted by Berry [21] demonstrate that the model goes from urban to antiurban and that the exurban areas start growing quickly. The concern of the technicians of the time is focused on the occupation of

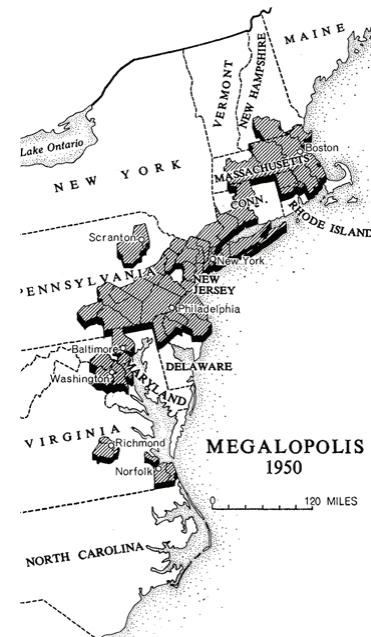


Fig. 2. Megalópolis [17].

the farming territories that are in charge of providing foodstuff to the population. The three paradigmatic plans in this respect are: the Amsterdam extension plan that contemplates an UR-I supported by the railway network and with an extreme design of the urban and the rural area; the Greater London plan that defines a “green belt” that acts as an urban containment measure; and the Finger plan in Copenhagen that establishes “green wedges” that penetrate the city [22].

At the end of the 20th century, the situation changed. The “Fordist” organization becomes a “post-Fordist” organization. This is characterized by the deepening of the energy crisis, the increase in oil prices, the flexibility of the productive organization and labour, the proliferation of horizontal connections, the emergence of local identities as “competitive advantages”, and the Welfare State crisis [23], [24].

The new technologies generate logistical changes. The growth perspectives of a place are conditioned to the possibilities that this place can offer to the valuation of the capital. Sassen [25] shows the creation of a new kind of financial centre that is extended and dispersed around the metropolitan area. This distribution is shaped like a network of high-activity nodes. The increase in capital mobility affects the spatial distribution of the production and financial markets [26]. The components of each chain of value are materialized in different kinds of productive islets in the territory [18].

Morphological studies of industrial parks in southern Europe [27]–[29] show differences between the Marshallian Industrial Districts and the new postindustrial agglomerations. In this respect, the analysis made by Boeri,

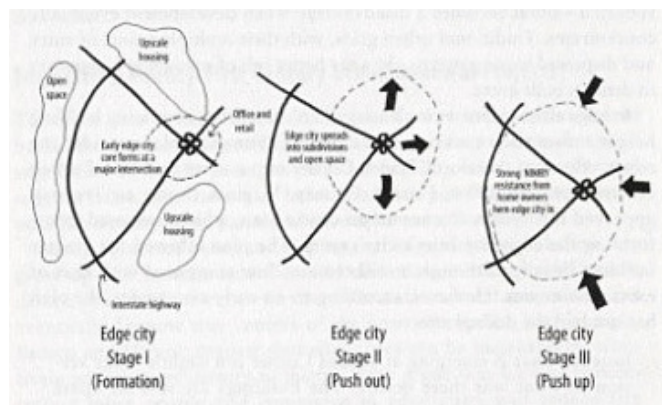
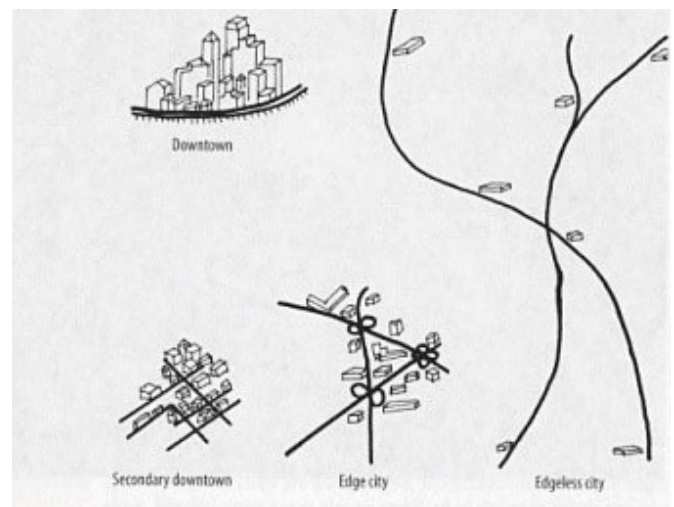


Fig. 3. Life cycle of a large edge city – office location type [35].



Lanzani and Marini [30] in Milan shows the substitution of the large industrial belt for a fine grain system that is dispersed around the metropolitan area, where transnational industries are centered in a global city and their production aspects in the industrial districts of the metropolitan area. In this new geography, shopping malls also occupy a prominent position. These new commercial artefacts become central nodes, whereas the suburban “market streets” constitute lineal urbanizations that spread commercial values around the metropolitan territory [31], [32].

In this context, Fishman [33] notices how the UR-I become self-sufficient cities when they reach a critical mass of population, industry, construction, and services, even though these spaces have tertiary equipment connected to other technical spaces and whose actual structure is seen as the various ring roads and highways that surround them. He calls them “technoburbs”. Also, Garreau [34] notices that in different cities across the United States (New Jersey, Boston, Detroit, Atlanta, Phoenix, Texas, California, San Francisco, and Washington), there are large areas of offices and commercial spaces for rent in the UR-I, and he calls them “edge city”. Later on, Lang [35] recognizes the emergence of “edgeless cities”, which double the size of the “edge city” and are not for mixed-use and do not have easy access to public transport (Fig. 3).

A greater amount of land is consumed, and the impression of sprawl increases. In this sense, Sieverts [36], in his study of the Frankfurt Rin-Meno metropolitan area and book, “Cities without Cities”, defines this territory as the “city in between” (*Zwischenstadt*). Sieverts understands this space as fragmented due to the multiplicity of realities that take place within it and considers that the values of urbanity held by the traditional city are not useful when acting upon these spaces.

II. Characteristics of the Buenos Aires UR-I

In recent years, in line with what has been happening in cities in Europe and the United States, there has been a proliferation of local studies that analyze the territorial changes produced by the hands of private global capital. Garay [37] suggests that in the last few decades there has been a process of urban expansion ruled by capital interests. In this sense, Ciccolella [38] suggests associating these territorial changes with their late incorporation into the global market.

The offer starts choosing locations that are easily reached by the users, therefore there are changes in the transportation dynamics. In this context, Blanco [39], [40] expresses the impact the metropolitan highway network has had on the new patterns of daily commuting, whereas Gutiérrez [41] affirms that public transportation is weakened as a public service and strengthened as a business.

In this new logic, new locations may be seen for tertiary, leisure, and commercial businesses [42]. Ciccolella [43] and Vecslir and Ciccolella [44], [45] suggest that there are tendencies towards the continuity of the dynamics, morphologies, and traditional locations, as well as the consolidation of a network of districts for tertiary businesses. Ciccolella and Lucioni [46] and Ciccolella and Mignaqui [47] address the study of the “corporate city”.

Another logic analyzed by the local bibliography is connected to industrial capital. Briano and Fritzsche [48] show the emergence of new patterns in industrial locations, and the influence of industrial parks in the territory is worth noting [49]. In this line, Briano, Fritzsche and Vio [50] state that industrial parks express the existing metropolitan competition to attract industrial investments.

In Buenos Aires, enclosed urbanization has also become a subject of study. Studies carried out by Szajnber [51], Vidal-Koppmann [52], [53], Thuillier [54] and Lombardo [55] analyse how enclosed urbanizations broaden social polarity in the UR-I. In this sense, Roitman and Phelps [56] suggest that they constitute an important factor in the emergence of a dual space.

Local studies suggest that the development of urban spaces has, as a consequence, the loss of productive lands. Barsky and Vio [57] state that private capital threatens the productive spaces in the UR-I. However, there is no comprehensive proposal for these territories. Among the bibliography reviewed, the study conducted by Rivas [58] is worth mentioning. It studies the implementation of a project to produce organic food to recover degraded areas. Moreover, Domínguez [59] analyzes the implementation of the Program called “Rural Change” in Buenos Aires (“Cambio Rural Bonaerense”, in Spanish). The farmers start producing crops without agrochemicals, which enhances the quality of their products and helps them provide goods with increased value. In this sense, Barsky [60] analyzes the PRO.SAA (Promotion of Sustainable Agricultural Activity) program (PRO.AAS: Promoción de la Actividad Agropecuaria Sustentable, in Spanish), which is an efficient way to protect peri-urban agriculture in Buenos Aires.

Conclusions

The views on the UR-I detected in cities of the United States and Europe and conceptualized by different authors show that these territories are observed from diverse perspectives. These denominations and notions about the UR-I allow us to discriminate new from old configurations and allow us to revise the territorial processes, the actors and the underlying factors in Buenos Aires.

The local bibliography allows us to confirm the emergence of new technologies of localization and conformation of industries and logistics centres, of large leisure and consumption facilities, and of new ways of living. And it also confirms the issue of the productive UR-I in Buenos Aires. The paper highlights the historic character of the spatial changes, and that the existing distribution and conceptualization of these territories is not unambiguous from a scientific perspective. Therefore, this territory should be understood as the production of specific and heterogeneous systems.

In this context, this paper raises the need for a characterization of these spaces. The territories that extend between urban and rural cores are no longer closed and clearly defined areas; instead, they encompass a considerable number of urban and rural spaces with different local authorities and distinct processes and

forms that warrant exploration. The results underscore the necessity of establishing planning that takes into account the realities of the UR-I space.

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