

# Preface

The PLUREL project (2007–2011) envisaged research on urban, peri-urban and rural interaction and strategies focusing on sustainable land use changes such as the preservation of green open areas, agricultural lands and other unbuilt areas under urbanization pressures. The research was done through close cooperation with the stakeholders from the case-study regions. For the purpose of better cooperation, a Board of Stakeholders was formed—to follow the research closely and recommend improvements in the way of communication between research and policy.

The research addressed important issues for all the regions with urban cores, peri-urban edges and rural hinterlands. The stakeholders, representing planners, local politicians, NGOs, nature protection organizations or networks of relevant actors, took an active role in the discussions, analysis and choices on the way to the end results.

The expectations were high on both sides. The stakeholders expected user-friendly recommendations, models, scenarios and interactive tools. The amount of work delivered in the end was impressive. The experience, through the interaction between researchers and policy makers, was highly valuable. The two worlds with different languages and perceptions came closer to each other. Ideas were freely exchanged and common strategies worked out.

PLUREL offers a wide range of products which will indisputably have impact on policies. These products include analysis and recommendation on governance and sustainable peri-urban land use, planning and financial instruments in peri-urban areas that will enhance sustainable land use, strategies for growth management, urban containment by conservation and densification, development of consistent blue and green infrastructure, promotion of local production and short transport circles, development of eco-services, and ways of assessing impacts on quality of life. All these are numerous examples of successfully worked out recommendations for preserving and developing the peri-urban areas as open, green and vital areas.

Three European regions from Western Europe, three from the former Eastern Europe and one from China—all with different traditions in planning and land use—learned a lot from each other in the process. The regions which are traditionally strong in planning—Montpellier, The Hague and Manchester could offer their

planning schemes and governance strategies as guides in the search for better balance in land use. The regions of Warsaw, Koper and Leipzig could offer their tradition in more social cohesive strategies. China offered decisive measures for vital green spaces and for containment of urban sprawl.

The whole process of attaining the research goals together—researchers and practitioners—seems to offer a good model for success.

The representative of the political post holders on behalf of the case-study regions in the Board of Stakeholders, Marcel Houtzager, portfolio holder ‘Green, recreation and tourism’ in The Hague Region, actively participated in the whole process. He is satisfied with the good communication between research and practice and with the overall results of the project. ‘I was confident when we started the process in PLUREL and I was confident when we finished it. Now we have excellent end-products, ready to use. PLUREL was a very complex project about a complex problem—the interaction between urban, urban-peri and rural areas and the preservation of landscape identities, balancing environmental and social values with economic interests. The results as we see them presented in this book show how successful researchers and practitioners have been in analyzing the problems, communicating well to all the parties involved, and recommending ways to solve those problems.

I strongly hope that this book will help in the search of effective methods for preserving open green space and improving the balance between urban and peri urban areas. This is needed for our quality of life, the climate change challenges and the economic viability of our regions. We live in demanding times and this book offers some of the recipes to find a way between economic prosperity and environmental healthy attitudes.’

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Marcel Houtzager

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