



Informal Plans and Informal Agencies; On Methodological Challenges for Peri-Urban Planning History in Sweden (Ca 1930 – 1970)

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Peri-urban development has played a secondary role in planning during the 20th century. However, although planning is primarily an urban activity, it is reasonable to argue that the urban focus in the historiography of planning has been even stronger than the urban hegemony in past planning. One of the reasons for this is that planning history has an urban tradition, inherited from the disciplines of urban history and architectural history. Due to the urban focus, alternative stories on peri-urban development and unconventional ideas in peri-urban planning have rarely been brought forward within planning history. Today, such ideas are needed, for instance in order to better understand the driving forces behind urban sprawl, and to find alternative stories of countryside development. Hence, peri-urban history needs to be brought into light. The paper addresses some of the methodological challenges when aiming to reposition (and reinterpret) peri-urban planning history from the outer periphery of planning history, into a rather more central position. It argues that such a reinterpretation calls for an inclusive approach to planning and planning documents; a shift from an exclusive urban focus necessitates a similar shift from formal discourses and formal plans, to informal documents and informal agencies. Contemporary discourses in planning theory as well as within landscape research provide a support for such a wide approach. The paper is introduced with a discussion on the need for further studies in peri-urban history, and with a methodological discussion on the possibilities to explore the inherently weak peri-urban planning through a combination of landscape- and planning history. The paper argues that an investigation of informal planning documents (produced by the official planning institutions), as well as of the activities of informal (or unconventional) planning agencies, is needed in order to understand the logics of the weak planning system. The second part of the paper presents a general introduction to peri-urban planning in Sweden from the 1930s onwards, which is followed by an investigation of peri-urban planning in Scania (in southernmost Sweden) in the 1960s. The latter analysis is primarily based on comprehensive planning documents produced by countryside municipalities; none of these plans were officially signed, and is therefore normally disregarded within planning and planning history. The discourses on agriculture, countryside development and landscape protection are studied in particular, in order to reveal controversies, contrasts and challenges concerning the peri-urban future. The final part discusses how studies of peri-urban planning history can make a contribution to contemporary ambitions within planning to support a sustainable development. The ongoing debate in Europe on urban sprawl is used as a point of departure for the discussion.

KEY WORDS: Urban sprawl, landscape history, peri-urban planning history, comprehensive planning, methodology, interdisciplinary.