

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES FOR DESCRIBING SEMI URBAN AREAS

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Introduction In many densely populated regions, a clear distinction between “urban” and “rural” is not possible anymore: areas containing complex properties of urbanized areas as well as the “open space” land use of land cover categories (agricultural and natural). Determining and monitoring these hybrid and dynamic landscapes forms a major challenge. Next to the classic sprawl and fringe approach, three other concepts are proposed and discussed.

Materials and methods This publication is a summary of the state-of-the-art on concepts proposed to describe and study those areas or landscapes not rural nor urban (Meeus & Gulinck, 2008). The concepts were derived from various sources in literature, compared with each other and some were subjected to debate in expert panels.

Results and conclusions One concept is that of the semi-urban area (SUA), in which specific forms of land use or land cover, for example hybrid land uses such as garden complexes and hobby- or other small scale agriculture (like horse keeping), in classic land use classification generally the “rest” classes (K. Bomans, Dewaelheyns, & Gulinck, 2011). A second concept is called the “basis open spaces approach” (Kirsten Bomans, Steenberghen, Dewaelheyns, Leinfelder, & Gulinck, 2010). Sealed surfaces (generally road infrastructure mostly surrounded by built-up areas) are seen as “boundaries” that include a basic open space. Landscape ecological properties of these “islands” of not built-up space can be measured. A third approach is called the “interphase” approach. It starts from the principle that every form of land use or land cover can be described as a phase between two or more distinct types of land cover, different in space, time or complexity and thus forming an “interphase”. Combinations are possible, and many cover types that are difficult to describe because of their scale or complexity can be defined and may give better insights in the overall characteristics of landscapes “in between” rural and urban.

References

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