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# Restructuring of the Rural-Urban Fringe: The Israeli Case Study

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## Abstract

In the last two decades the rural space in Israel and particularly the rural-urban fringe (RUF) has undergone a process of restructuring. The changes, attributed to long term trends and processes common to many developed economies, have been emphasized by a tremendous increase in the intensity of production, the decline of agricultural employment, the evolution of non-agricultural land uses and activities under a strategy of pluriactivity, the encroachment of urban areas and the sub-urbanisation of the countryside. The rural space is being restructured by shifting from being an agricultural space to become multifunctional. The restructuring process of the RUF can be analysed through a number of domains:

1. Demography – In- and out-migration flows of population which differ in their characteristics according to the nature of the population.
2. Social structure – A clear shift from a low diversity of social groups (mainly farmers) towards a high diversity of social groups. The outcome is a range of social groups from veteran farmers to gentrifiers.
3. Economic structure – A shift from a farming space and related activities towards a multifunctional space. The outcome is an increasing tendency towards a shift from a space of production towards a space of consumption.
4. Organisational change – A transformation from village towards suburb: changes in the private and public landscape.
5. Environmental change – The penetration of environmental nuisances unknown before facing increasing pressures of environmental protection.

The major resulting issues are: the loss of prime agricultural land, evolving new land use patterns, declining income among farming households, changing nature and demographic structure of rural communities, excess expansion of built environment beyond the real needs, increasing pressure on local infrastructure, environmental conflicts and growing imbalance of natural processes.

The ultimate solutions to these issues can be expected to extend over time. A number of practical solutions are: identifying agriculture and farmland base as critical for the sustainability of local communities, encouraging potential income from sophisticated agricultural

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products and from complementary non-agricultural income sources that do not produce environmental nuisances, the development of local entrepreneurial activities that support local development, and strict monitoring procedures and policies regarding land uses thus decreasing the potential for environmental degradation.

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