



Urban/rural interface: Governing the chaos

António Ferreira

Instituto Politécnico de Coimbra, Escola Superior Agrária de Coimbra, CERNAS, Coimbra, Portugal (aferreira@esac.pt)

Cities have become recently the home for more than half of the world's population. Cities are often seen as ecological systems just a short step away from collapse [Newman 2006]. Being a human construction, cities disrupt the natural cycles and the patterns of temporal and spatial distribution of environmental and ecological processes. Urbanization produces ruptures in biota, water, energy and nutrients connectivity that can lead to an enhanced exposure to disruptive events that hamper the wellbeing and the resilience of urban communities in a global change context.

An important issue in what concerns urban sprawl is the interface between the urban and the rural territories. Being an extremely dynamic landscape, and assuring some quality of life and buffering some of the pervasive negative impacts of urban areas in terms of disrupting the function of the natural ecosystems, in limit situations this interface can act as a conveyor belt of catastrophic events originated in the rural world, into the urban space. The Coimbra 2005 wildfire is a fine example of how a poorly managed urban/rural interface can put populations in danger, by allowing the fire to spread towards the urban green infrastructure, burning houses in the process. Major river flows that flood urban areas are also good examples of the lack of management and planning can result in the loss of assets and even put in danger human lives.

This presentation reviews the impact of extreme events and the transmission from the urban to the rural worlds, but also from the rural to the urban territories, and establishes the need to govern risk at various levels and using the full range of governance tools.