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A politics of place framework for unravelling peri-urban conflict: An example of peri-urban Sydney, Australia

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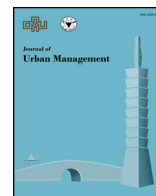


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A politics of place framework for unravelling peri-urban conflict: An example of peri-urban Sydney, Australia[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Peri-urban areas are increasingly described as ‘third’ spaces with unique characteristics, in opposition to spaces awaiting urban development. However, in many peri-urban areas the process of defining what this ‘third’ space is, is triggering conflict over the meanings attributed to the peri-urban landscape, its ownership and, importantly, whose identity it represents. Our aim in this paper is to develop a framework of the ‘politics of place/landscape identity’ that advances analysis and synthesis of conflict over identity in peri-urban areas. This framework is grounded in the ‘politics of place’ and ‘politics of landscape’ literature, in the ‘place and landscape identity’ literature, and builds upon existing landscape/place models. It integrates the physical, practice, representation and identity dimensions of ‘landscape’ and ‘place’ in a perspective on the ‘politics of place’. We illustrate how the framework may shed light on the ‘politics of place’ in Wollondilly Shire, a peri-urban local government area in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. Our case study demonstrates how the different dimensions of the politics of place are articulated, and particularly around what representations they are ‘crystallised’. The framework provides cues for planners and decision makers concerning the representations that would need to be renegotiated between different groups in peri-urban environments, in order to create broader consensus. In the case of Wollondilly the representation that could constitute a ‘nodal point’ for possible intervention is the definition of the notion of ‘viability’ of farming operations.

Introduction

Peri-urban areas, or the rural urban fringes, are spaces in mutation. They are neither urban nor rural and thereby pose a definitional problem. They have been defined in two ways: either as ‘suburbs in waiting’, where the assumption is that they will eventually become urbanised (Bunker & Holloway, 2001, p. 17, Buxton & Low Choy, 2007), or as a ‘third space’ (*tiers espace*), that is, a space in between urban and rural with distinct characteristics and functions (Vanier, 2000; Allen, 2003; Gallent, 2006; Gallent & Shaw, 2007; Ravetz, Fertner, & Nielsen, 2013). The conception of peri-urban areas as a *third space* suggests that they are not destined to become urban, but rather to exist as a unique, third type of space in between urban and rural spaces. As such, *third space* has its own identity, its own set of challenges, and its own spatial planning needs (Vanier, 2000).

However, a common observation is that peri-urban spaces are undergoing rapid land use change, with agricultural land being taken for residential or industrial purposes (Foley & Scott, 2014; Sinclair, 1999). Such land use changes go hand in hand with changes in the social fabric, as new residents and businesses move into the area. These new residents often value and inhabit the landscape differently, leading to a diversification of peri-urban landscapes (Argent, Tonts, Jones, & Holmes, 2010). In addition, agricultural uses

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are also changing, broadly following two contradictory paths. On the one hand, agricultural activities become increasingly industrialised and intensive (e.g. poultry farming) (Henderson, 2003; Taylor, Butt, & Amati, 2017); on the other, a shift towards a post-productivist, multi-functional landscape is taking place (Argent, 2002; Holmes, 2006; Wilson, 2001; Wilson, 2008; Zasada, 2011).

Change in land use, social fabric and the nature of agricultural activities does not occur in a smooth, predictable linear fashion. Rather, change typically occurs in ad hoc and inadvertent ways, steadily building up the potential for conflict in peri-urban areas (Bailoni, Edelblutte, & Tchékémian, 2012; Henderson, 2003; Pacione, 2013; von der Dunk, Grêt-Regamey, Dalang, & Hersperger, 2011; Kennedy, Butt, & Amati, 2016; Taylor et al., 2017).

Several authors have demonstrated that conflict in peri-urban areas, as well as in other farming areas undergoing similar processes of change, is often triggered by competing discourses over the *meaning* of the landscape, and the definition of what constitutes ‘rurality’ (Friedland, 2002; Frouws, 1998; Scott, 2008; Woods, 1998; Woods, 2003; Foley & Scott, 2014). Woods (2006) supports this argument and explains that ‘politics’ in rural areas has transitioned from being ‘rural politics’ to being a ‘politics of the rural’. With the ‘rural politics’, the focus was on policies regarding agriculture or the management of rural lands. The rural environment was therefore considered as the ‘context’ for policies. With the ‘politics of the rural’, the focus is now on defining what the meaning of rurality is. Woods (2006) argues that this would be the result of the declining importance of agriculture in the economy, the increasing criticism of agricultural practices and the counter-urbanisation movement, with the arrival of in-migrants with different values. Debates over meaning can be seen as reflecting power relationships and often invoke questions of ownership of the landscape (Walker & Fortmann, 2003; Masuda & Garvin, 2008): who defines what a landscape should look like, and which practices are considered legitimate? Therefore, such debates - which ostensibly favour one identity over another - define *who belongs* to and *who is excluded* from a landscape (Trudeau, 2006).

Conflict over place and landscape has, albeit fragmentarily, received ample attention in scholarly debate. We draw from this scholarship with the objective to shed light on the nature of the relationships between different groups and their shared landscape or place. To do so, we develop a framework through review of different conceptualisations of place and landscape in the literature. We simultaneously consider the literatures on ‘landscape’ and ‘place’. These literatures are distinct in the sense that ‘place’ is often considered as capturing the lived experience of individuals in a specific location, and ‘landscape’ as focusing on the way individuals perceive the landscape from the outside (Setten, 2006; Meinig, 1979). Landscape is thus considered as more “*external and objective*” and place as more “*experiential*” (Meinig, 1979, p. 3). The literatures on place and landscape nevertheless exhibit many commonalities (Setten, 2006); hence our choice to consider them simultaneously.

The paper is organised as follows. First, we introduce the concepts of the ‘politics of place’ and the ‘politics of landscape’ and the various dimensions of ‘landscape’ and ‘place’ that are at play in these literatures (physical landscape, practices and representations). We then discuss how ‘identity’ is addressed in the literatures on place and landscape. We then proceed with an examination of existing models that integrate place and/or landscape dimensions. These models are then used as a basis for our framework of the ‘politics of place/landscape identity’, integrating physical, practice, representation and identity dimensions. We then illustrate our framework with a case study of conflict over the meaning of rurality in peri-urban Sydney (Wollondilly Shire, a local government area on the south-western edge of Sydney). In the Discussion and Conclusion sections we examine how our framework might be employed as a cue for identifying critical dimensions of the ‘politics of place/landscape identity’ in peri-urban environments and helping practitioners identify representations of the landscape/place that could be renegotiated. We also discuss the potential use of our framework in other planning context, and its limitations.

Policy of place/landscape identity framework

Politics of place

Human geographers, soon followed by environmental psychologists, were the first to develop the concept of place. They aimed to describe the relationship human beings create with their special places, through a holistic conceptualisation of place as an emotional, cultural and psychological phenomenon for human geographers (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1991), and as a range of variables (place identity, attachment, dependence/satisfaction) pertaining to sense of place for environmental psychologists (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). These conceptualisations of place mainly focused on individuals’ relationships to place and paid little attention to how groups attribute meaning to a specific place (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000; Stokowski, 2002). This conception is not relevant in our context as conflict in peri-urban areas arises from *groups* creating competing meanings of a place.

In the 1980s, critical geographers developed a second conceptualisation of place by taking a political entry point, placing emphasis on how groups attribute competing meanings to places (Massey, 1994; Hayden, 1995; Cresswell, 1996). In this conception, place is no longer understood as an individual’s perception of a place, but rather as a *socio-political construct* moulded by social differences: social groups develop different relationships to place depending on their gender, ethnicity, sexual preference, social class etc. Therefore, the divisions existing in space reflect the social structure of a society (Cresswell, 1996), and more specifically the power relationships between different social groups. Other approaches resembling the critical geography perspective derive from social psychology, sociology and recreational studies (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000; Stokowski, 2002; Benson & Jackson, 2013). Dixon and Durrheim (2000), in their critique of the individualistic perspective on place as offered by environmental psychologists, emphasise that relationships to place are constructed collectively, through everyday discourse and have a strong political dimension. In doing so, they ‘displace’ place identity from the individual mind to the *dialogue* - from the individual sphere to the collective sphere. They acknowledge its political dimension by explaining that groups, through discursive actions, justify their relationships to a place while excluding others.

When considering the mechanisms that lead to the creation of collective place identities, authors insist mostly on the discursive and practice dimension (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000; Benson & Jackson, 2013; Stokowski, 2002). Both Dixon and Durrheim (2000) and Stokowski (2002) consider collective place identities as principally created through language and discourse (processes of meaning-making), used to include or exclude individuals/groups from a place. Benson and Jackson (2013), both sociologists, also acknowledge that place identities are created through discourse. However, they propose an additional ‘practice’ dimension by arguing that the process of place making occurs through *discursive* practices, but equally through *everyday spatial* practices.

Critical geographers and their kin conceptualise place as being made of the socio-political relationships of different groups in a society. The meaning of place can therefore be fought over, conquered, contested and resisted. Different groups do this through their everyday discourses (meaning-making process) and through the actions performed by group members in the physical landscape (practices).

Politics of landscape

The concept of ‘landscape’ often focuses on the ‘objective’ qualities of a piece of land, apprehended by an external observer. Studies on landscape perceptions/preferences aim to identify which elements of the physical landscapes are valued positively or negatively by the external observers (Coetier, 1996; Kalivoda, Vojar, Skřivanová, & Zahradník, 2014; Strumse, 1994). Another category of studies goes one step further by connecting individuals’ landscape preferences to the ‘values’ or ‘representations’ they attribute to the landscape (Jorgensen, 2011; Anderson, Ford, & Williams, 2017; de Groot & van den Born, 2003; Soliva & Hunziker, 2009; Howley, 2011). Whilst these studies tell us how landscape preferences are influenced by values, they do not elicit how those values can be source of conflicts between social groups at the local scale.

Another conception of landscape, often described as the German-Nordic tradition (Olwig, 1996; Setten, 2006) but similarly developed in Anglo-Saxon literature, sees the landscape as a purely political space (Mitchell, 1996). In this second conceptualisation of landscape, landscape is a lived space. People claim their belonging to the landscape through their daily practices and these practices give meaning to the landscape. This meaning is contested and resisted as it is often seen as the expression of ‘the dominant group(s) within [the] polity’ (Gailing & Leibenath, 2017, p. 338). This perspective relates ‘landscape’ to the political realm, reflecting the political struggles over the (physical) landscape and its meanings (Setten, 2006).

The conceptualisations of place and landscape described above tackle various elements with bearing on the analysis of group relationships in peri-urban environments: that is, relations between groups which may strive to impose specific meaning on the physical landscape, and legitimise specific practices. We distinguish three key dimensions of place and landscape: *meaning* (or representations shared through discourses); *practices*; and *physical landscape*. A further important aspect of the debate on peri-urban spaces is *identity*. From an identity perspective, peri-urban areas are a ‘third space’ without a stabilised identity and with opportunity for various groups to redefine or renegotiate it. The next section examines how the literature on place and landscape addresses identity.

Place and landscape identity

Identity has received scholarly attention in both place and landscape studies. As regards place, Lewicka (2008) understands the notion of identity in relation to place in two ways. One is the ‘genius loci’, an ancient Greek notion that stresses the uniqueness, or spirit, of a place in terms of its specific features. Identity, therefore, lies in the unique characteristics of the landscape. The other is identity as a ‘feature of a person’, or how a place is favouring or hindering an individual’s sense of self (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996; Hauge, 2007; Lewicka, 2008). Hauge (2007) distinguishes three identity theories in environment-behaviour studies that explain place identity as the feature of a person: place-identity theory; social identity theory; and identity process theory. The first one, *place-identity theory*, developed by Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff (1983), has been criticised for not being theoretically substantial because it does not define the nature of the relation between place and identity (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000; Hauge, 2007). The second one, *social identity theory* (Tajfel, 1974) addresses inter-group relationships by identifying out-groups and by consequently valuing the in-group more positively than the out-group. The weakness of this theory is that it does not address the question of the processes leading to the creation of identity (Breakwell, 2010). Finally, *identity process theory* (IPT) offers an integrative model of how individuals or groups construct and maintain their identity, particularly when individual or collective identity is threatened (Jaspal & Yampolsky, 2011; Breakwell, 1986). Therefore, IPT claims to be more encompassing than social identity theory because it does not only focus on intergroup relationships, but also more broadly on the various processes of creation of identity (Breakwell, 2010). When used for the study of place identity, IPT explains how an individual or group’s relationship to a specific place supports various aspects of a person/group’s identity (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). Breakwell (2010) distinguishes four ‘principles’ of identity defined in the table below: i) distinctiveness; ii) continuity; iii) self-esteem; and iv) self-efficacy (Table 1).

Table 1
Definition of the four identity principles of the IPT.

IPT principles	Definitions
Distinctiveness	How a place enables someone from distinguishing him or herself from others
Continuity	How places play the role of referent of past selves and actions and then give a sense of continuity to individuals
Self-esteem	How a place allows someone to have a positive conception of oneself
Self-efficacy	How the environment meets individuals’ situational demands and enhances their ability to undertake certain tasks

In landscape studies, ‘landscape identity’ is conceptualised similarly to place identity. In their review of the literature on landscape identity, Stobbelaar and Pedroli (2011) identify two types of landscape identity, each articulated at both the *personal* and the *cultural* level. Firstly, they identify a *spatial* landscape identity, which focuses on the physical characteristics of the landscape. At the *personal* level, it captures the way individuals are able to orientate themselves in a landscape by recognising its specific features. At the *cultural* level, it focuses on the characteristics, recognisable by all, that make one landscape different from another (e.g. Kaligarič & Ivajnsič, 2014; Owen, 2005). The other conception of landscape identity used by Stobbelaar and Pedroli (2011) is the *existential* landscape identity, where landscapes are differentiated from each other on the basis of the meaning individuals (*personal*) or groups (*cultural*) attribute to them, according to the role they played in a person/group’s life. While the definition of the *spatial-cultural* landscape identity resembles the ‘genius loci’ presented earlier, the definition of the *existential-cultural* landscape identity parallels the definition of place identity as a ‘feature of a person’.

Both conceptualisations (‘genius loci’ and ‘feature of a person’) are relevant to the analysis of place/landscape dimensions of peri-urban environments: social groups in the peri-urban environment base their identity on the maintenance of specific features of the landscape, as well as on how the landscape enables them to build a sense of self.

This section offered a succinct overview of the literatures on politics of place/landscape and place/landscape identity, identifying four dimensions that jointly constitute the ‘politics of place/landscape identity’: physical landscape, practices, meaning and identity. The next section describes potential interconnections between these four dimensions as conceptualised in selected models of place and landscape.

Place and landscape models

We identified four existing models of place and landscape, each suggesting or hinting at different interconnections between various dimensions of the politics of place/landscape.

Stedman (2003)’s model describes place (attachment) as resulting from the meanings individuals or groups attribute to the physical landscape: the physical features of the landscape influence the interpretations individuals or groups have of a place. This, in turn, creates a specific relationship to a place (in Stedman’s case place attachment). Similarly, the model by Greider and Garkovich (1994) suggests that the meaning a group gives to the physical landscape reflects its identity. Where Stedman (2003) sees the physical features of the landscape as influencing the meaning individuals give to a place, for Greider and Garkovich (1994) a group’s self-definition influences the meaning given to the landscape. These first two models offer insight into the relationships between the physical landscape and its representation. However, they do not consider the *practices* that also contribute to constructing relationships between groups and their place or landscape.

A third model, Stephenson (2008)’s Cultural Values Model offers insights into how practices can be incorporated by considering individual or group relationships with the landscape as resulting from interactions between ‘*forms*’ (natural and cultural landscape features), ‘*practices*’ (human practices and natural processes) and ‘*relationships*’ (people-people and people-landscape interactions). The latter refers to the process of meaning making through stories, myths, memories and the like. In Stephenson (2008)’s conceptualisation it is not the *connection* between meaning and the physical landscape that creates a relationship between an individual/group and a landscape, but rather the *mutual interactions* between forms, practices and relationships. Whereas Stedman (2003) and Greider and Garkovich (1994) established a uni-directional relationships between meaning, the physical landscape and the creation of a relationship to a place, Stephenson (2008)’s model offers bi-directional linkages.

Whilst the models explored so far identify different dimensions of place and landscape, they do not clarify *how* those dimensions articulate the ‘politics of place/landscape’.¹ A model developed by Larsen (2004) (a refinement of Harner (2001)) integrates different dimensions of landscape within a broader political frame. In Larsen (2004)’s conception of place, the physical landscape, defined as ‘means’, is interpreted and given ‘meaning’, and it is the *interpretation process* that creates place identity. This approach is similar to Stedman (2003)’s model in the sense that meaning attributed to the landscape by individuals and groups instils a feeling of place identity, in a uni-directional fashion. However, Larsen (2004) adds a political dimension, arguing that the nature of place identity varies according to the positioning of a group in society and its power relationships with other groups. Larsen (2004) argues that a place identity is *hegemonic* when: 1. a group has control over the landscape as well as over the meaning attributed to it; and 2. this meaning is accepted as legitimate by other groups in society, including groups that may be oppressed by this hegemonic place identity. Place identity is said to be *resistant* when a group offers an alternative interpretation of the landscape, and *emergent* when the meaning and control over the landscape is renegotiated between groups (Larsen, 2004).

Regarding identity, some of the models discussed tackle either landscape identity (Greider & Garkovich, 1994) or place identity (Harner, 2001; Larsen, 2004). However, in these models, identity is often considered as emerging directly from meaning attributed by groups to the landscape, except for Larsen (2004) who considers identity as created through the process of *differentiation* between an in-group and out-group. However, he does not detail the features of identity and its relationships with the other dimensions of place/landscape.

The models reviewed (Table 2) articulate the relationships between different dimensions of place/landscape differently (uni-directional or bi-directional). In addition, the nature of identity and its relationship to the other dimensions of place/landscape are not detailed.

¹ Greider and Garkovich (1994) do acknowledge that competing meanings are given to the landscape, however without going into detail

Table 2
Dimensions of place/landscape addressed by existing models.

	Stedman (2003)	Greider & Garkovich (1994)	Larsen (2004)	Stephenson (2008)
Physical landscape	X	X	X	X
Practices				X
Meaning/ representation	X	X	X	X
Identity		X	X	
Politics of place		X	X	
Directionality	Uni-directional	Uni-directional	Uni-directional	Bi-directional

The next section shows how the literature on social representations and identity process theory (IPT) contributes to clarifying the nature of the relationships (uni- or bi-directional) between the various dimensions of place/landscape, and to better integrating the concept of identity to the politics of place/landscape.

Relationships between physical landscape, practices and representations

Stephenson (2008) argues that practices interact with the physical landscape and its meaning. The literature on social representations, addressing the relationships between meaning (or representation) and practices, takes a similar stance, and brings additional insight on how these interactions actually take place.

Abric (1994) defends the idea that representations² determine practices, based on the assumption that the subject is active, and that factors related to culture, norm and values influence practices. However, Abric (1994) also explains that a representation that influences current practices, might have been determined by old-practices. Therefore, Abric (1994) concludes that practices and social representations are *co-dependent and create each other*. A similar stance is adopted in the social practices literature. However, establishing the co-dependent nature of practices and representations does not explain when and how meaning/representation determines practices and vice versa. To explain this, Abric (1994) makes the assumption that when the reference to the collective memory is used to justify practices, and when individuals/groups have some autonomy in relation to external constraints, practices are determined by representations. On the other hand, under external material or social constraints, individuals or groups may be forced to change their practices. This could, in turn, influence social representations.

Social representation and identity

As we have seen, ‘identity’ is often considered as a direct outcome of meaning making, leaving the role of identity in fostering individuals/groups’ relationships to place unacknowledged. However, the literature on representations and IPT demonstrates that identity does not emerge directly from meaning making, but rather that representations and identity processes *interact* (Breakwell, 1993; Breakwell, 2010; Jaspal & Yampolsky, 2011). This interaction is bi-directional as social representations are considered as *impacting on* as well as *being impacted by* identity processes. Identity impacts on social representations when a group utilises a social representation to determine and then maintain the distinction between themselves (in-group) and others (out-group) (Breakwell, 1993; Breakwell, 2010). Conversely, social representations can influence identity: when a change occurs in a dominant social representation, the role it plays in the identity of the person can change, leading sometimes altogether to change in identity (Breakwell, 2014). Taking our cue from social psychology, our postulate is that there exists an intermediate step between the representational dimension of landscape and the emergence of place identity, which is identity. Considering that the notion of identity, as conceptualised in place and landscape studies, is dual (genius loci and feature of a person), we consider that they both contribute to the creation of place identity. Finally, we also saw that the relationship between social representations and identity is also bi-directional.

Synthesis

In summary, the ‘politics of place/landscape identity’ can be considered as emerging from the interplay between practices, representations (meaning), identity and the physical landscape (Fig. 1). The relationships between these four elements are always bi-directional: external pressures, for example changes in the physical landscape, can push a change in practices and progressively influence representations and identity, but representations can also be used to reinforce identity and determine practices as well as the appearance of the physical landscapes (Fig. 1). These four dimensions are embedded into the three moments of the politics of place identity identified by Larsen (2004): *hegemony, resistance, emergence* (Fig. 1) and together comprise our heuristic framework.

We will now illustrate our framework in a case study of Wollondilly Shire, a peri-urban local government area in the Greater Sydney Basin, Australia.

² the way meaning is formed through categories in the mind and shared with others through language HALL, S. 1997. The work of representation. In: HALL, S. (ed.) *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices*. London: Sage, in association with The Open University.

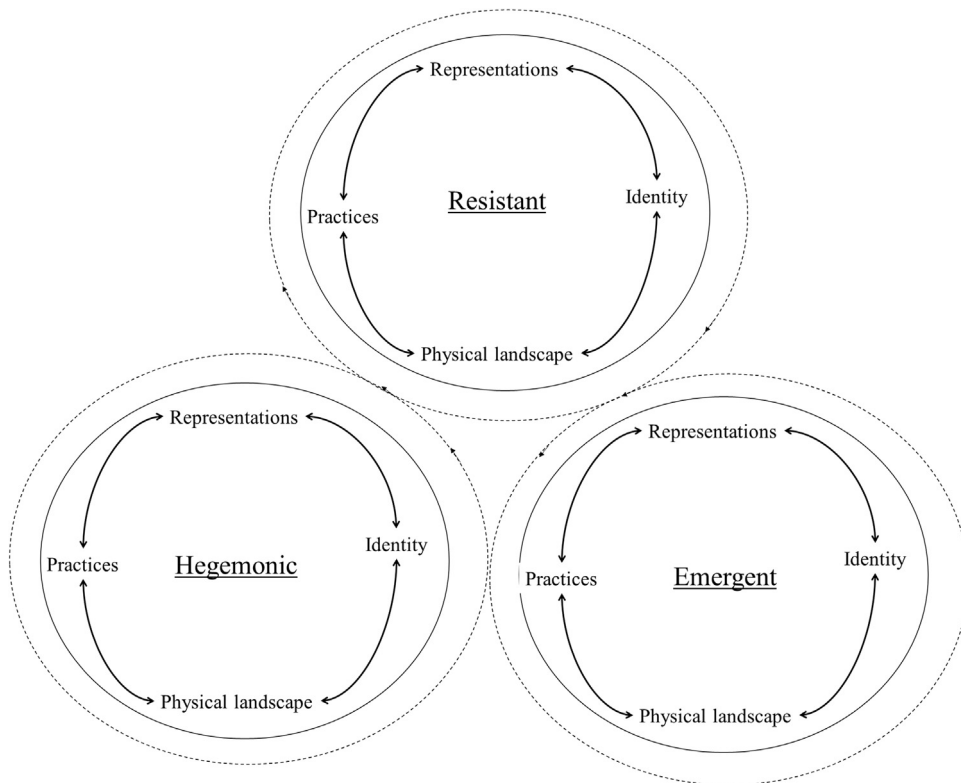


Fig. 1. Politics of place/landscape identity framework.

Case study: Wollondilly Shire, Sydney, NSW, Australia

Wollondilly Shire is situated in the South West of Sydney, New South Wales (NSW) (Fig. 2). It was one of the early farming areas in Australia, producing food for Sydney since the 19th century. Today it remains an important farming area, producing 11% of the value of agricultural production of the Greater Sydney Basin, the main farming activities (in terms of value of agricultural production) being poultry farming (livestock), followed by vegetable growing, dairy farming, eggs, and then cut flowers and fruits (Macarthur Regional Organisation of Councils, 2016).

Wollondilly is increasingly accommodating residential development due to its 'fringe' position in relation to Sydney, a common phenomenon in Sydney's peri-urban Shires. Non-farming residents often bring different views of what the landscape should look like and what activities should occur in the Shire. These visions may compete with those held by farmers, the group that is traditionally in charge of managing the landscape in rural areas. This creates conflict about what 'rural' means, how development should occur, what 'growth' means, and what 'farming' should look like.

Materials and methods

We analysed the Wollondilly Growth Management Strategy, the main policy document that presents Council's vision for the Shire. We also analysed 24 proposals for rezoning from rural to residential, made during 2011 - 2016. We looked at how housing development was argued for, how farming was depicted, and what community submissions were made. We also conducted 24 in-depth interviews with 15 farmers in the area, as well as seven in-depth interviews with eight planners and managers at the State and Local level.

We now illustrate how the 'politics of place/landscape identity' are playing out in the case study area, using our framework as a heuristic device. We first present the two competing hegemonic identities that determine the development of the shire and both contribute, in different ways, to the marginalisation of farming in the Shire. We then present how farmers develop a resistant place identity, re-asserting their legitimacy in the Shire. Finally, we explore how some of the hegemonic representations of farming could be challenged and renegotiated, potentially leading to an emergent place identity.

Hegemonic place identity

The identity of the Wollondilly Shire is based on the idea of its distinctiveness as a peri-urban landscape (*genius loci*). This idea of distinctiveness is represented in the Shire's vision of 'Rural Living'. 'Rural Living' is defined through nine characteristics, three of

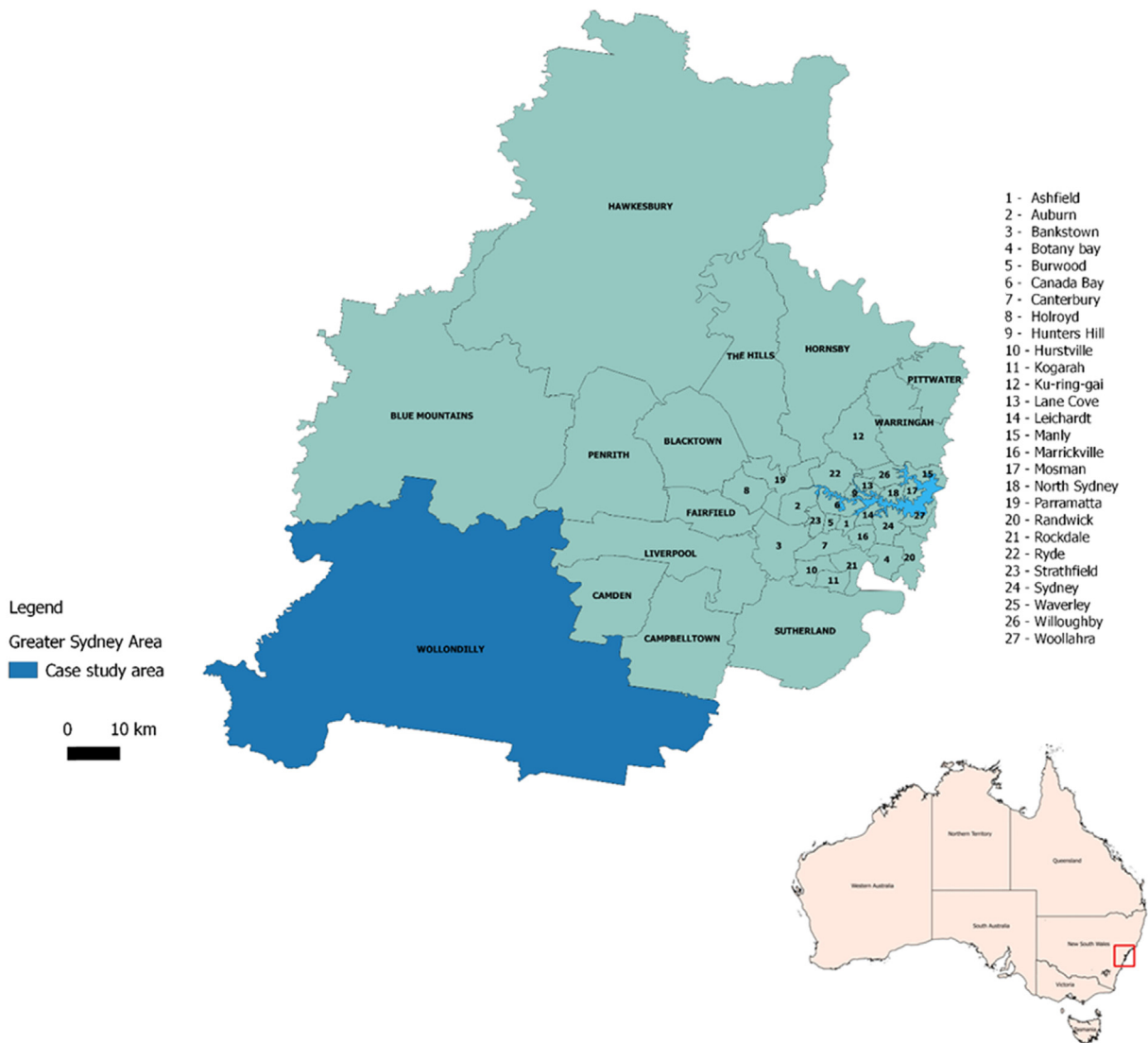


Fig. 2. The Wollondilly Shire, Sydney area, NSW, Australia.

[Sources: Greater Sydney area: Incorporates or developed using Administrative Boundaries, PSMA Australia Limited licensed by the Commonwealth of Australia under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence (CC BY 4.0)/ Australia: @ Natural Earth].

which pertain to the type of spatial development deemed suitable by Council, and one to the type of agriculture that Council wants in the Shire. The three characteristics related to spatial development are: 1) rural setting and character, with farmlands and natural areas located between separate towns and villages; etc.; 2) towns and villages, i.e. separate towns and villages with various opportunities; and 3) buildings and development, i.e. being sympathetic to the existing built environment and character of the area. These characteristics illustrate that maintaining a clear (and aesthetically harmonious) divide between city and country is a priority for the Wollondilly Shire Council. To do so the Council develops a suite of policies (e.g. housing policies and policies in the integration of growth) that promotes the development around the towns and villages whilst ensuring their spatial separation. These policies state that the development of housing must occur in proximity to towns and villages, that growth centres must be identified, and that the density of dwellings must be higher in proximity to centres (Wollondilly Shire Council, 2011). Finally, one policy also affirms that new developments must be “sympathetic to the existing form and traditional character of our built environment” (Wollondilly Shire Council, 2011, p. 17).

However, ‘Rural Living’ also considers productive landscapes and emphasises the importance of maintaining ‘Viable Agriculture’. Two policies detail how and why farmland should be protected. The first explains that the Council will aim at protecting the rural and resource lands (which include farmlands) having a specific economic, environmental and/or cultural value, but does not provide information on how the values of these lands will be determined. The second explains that rural and resource lands (the latter including farmlands) will be protected by preventing “incremental growth” contributing to “land fragmentation” (Wollondilly Shire Council, 2011, p. 11). This second policy shows that the Council considers that it is the implementation of a city-country divide that

rural and resource lands will be preserved.

The type of spatial development promoted by Council aspires to be inclusive, enabling housing development whilst protecting agricultural activities. However, analysis of the rezoning proposals (arguably ‘policy in practice’) suggests that proponents - private landowners aiming to rezone their land - mostly appeal to the concept of the city-country divide and the aesthetics attached to it, to *naturalise* housing developments in the landscape. That is, constructing them as ‘in-place’ while defining agricultural uses as ‘out of place’.

Proponents often use the argument of alignment of their proposal with the city-country divide concept and its aesthetic dimension to justify housing development, even describing it as “*logical and necessary*”.³ They explain that the development would be occurring on lands adjoining a town or village, or adjoining a future development that has already been approved, and will be “*in keeping with adjoining [residential] land uses*”. Another oft-used argument is that the proposed development will demarcate the edge of the village by creating a boundary or transition between urban and rural, and therefore maintains a separation between village and rural/natural land. Such boundaries or transitions are sometimes described as “*a logical visual catchment boundary*”, or a “*necessary transitional buffer*”. Furthermore, proposals sometimes reason that development will be in keeping with the aesthetics of the area. The location of a development close to an existing (or planned) housing development and its expected coherence with the “*village atmosphere*” or the “*adjoining residential character*” are often used to argue that a “*logical rezoning*” or “*logical progression*” is proposed, emphasising that this type of development is a natural and legitimate development in the area and therefore speaks to the rurality defended by Council.

In contrast, our analysis found the ‘productive’ landscape to be marginalised in planning practices. Many rezoning proposals dismiss the land to be rezoned as not currently used for agriculture, or as used for agriculture but with low productivity. Furthermore, applicants often reason that lands could not be farmed in the future because they are ‘not viable’. Proponents give a variety of reasons: the parcel of land is too small, of low agricultural value and/or, if kept for farming, likely to create conflict with adjoining residential uses.

In summary, housing development is thus presented as ‘in place’ and has the potential to expand unconstrained, whereas farming is considered as non-viable, as a nuisance, and consequently as ‘out of place’. This results in rapid and unconstrained subdivision of lands in proximity to towns and villages in the Shire. We highlight that even though the expansion of housing development seems to be dominating in planning practices in Wollondilly Shire - and in the Sydney Basin more generally -, there are planning entities (or individuals within planning entities) in the Sydney Basin advocating for the continuation of peri-urban farming. For example, some employees of the NSW Department of Primary Industries developed a Strategic Plan for Sustainable Agriculture – Sydney Region and a Right to Farm Policy for farmers in peri-urban Sydney (NSW Agriculture, 1998; NSW Department of Primary Industries, 2015). Furthermore, the Sydney Peri-Urban Network (SPUN) of Councils⁴ was set up to advocate for the recognition of the specificity of peri-urban areas as *third spaces* and their specific planning needs, such as balancing housing development with protection of agriculture (Edge Land Planning, 2015). However, to date these initiatives have had limited impact.

Competing hegemonic place identity

This first hegemonic place identity, as described above, is often challenged by members of the the local community through submissions to the rezoning proposals. Their submissions often exploit the idea of the *distinctiveness* of the Shire (genius loci) to counter the arguments made by rezoning proponents. This distinctiveness is also articulated around the idea of ‘Rural Living’, but interpreted rather differently. Here, ‘distinctiveness’ is characterised by the development of *low density* residential housing in a rural landscape (hybridisation of the rural landscape). For those residents, low-density development maintains the special character of the area, its “*unique small town culture, rural environment and atmosphere*” or “*its picturesque rural scenery*” whereas the higher density developments (proposed in rezoning proposals) are considered as creating a ‘suburban’ character. This representation of the landscape has impacted the physical landscape of the Shire through the expansion of low-density residential development and non-traditional agricultural uses (e.g. ‘horsiculture’⁵). These changes in the physical landscape emerged through various planning practices, past and present (e.g. family excision, community titles, zoning ordinances). They have inadvertently enabled this second type of place identity to be represented in the physical landscape of the Shire. At the same time, farming practices have progressively been challenged and increasingly been considered as illegitimate: new low-density residents often hold a representation of rurality that does not include agricultural activity, and certainly not the intensive variety.

Farmers’ resistant place identity

The marginalisation of the ‘productive’ landscape under hegemonic place identities has led some of the farmers of Wollondilly Shire to develop a resistant place identity.⁶ This resistant place identity is based on their feelings threatened continuity and enhanced distinctiveness. The feeling of threatened continuity stems from farmers’ self-representation as a disappearing social group in Wollondilly Shire, while the feeling of enhanced distinctiveness comes from a self-representation as good carers of the land as opposed to non-farming landowners whose use of the land they consider as inappropriate.

³ The quotes in italic in the ‘Hegemonic place identity’ and ‘Competing hegemonic place identity’ are from the rezoning proposals, whereas the quotes in italic in the ‘Farmers’ resistant place identity’ section are from farmers’ interviews.

⁴ A network of 12 peri-urban Councils in the Greater Sydney area, including Wollondilly Shire Council.

⁵ The use of farmlands for equestrianism

⁶ This resistant place identity has also been triggered by other factors, such as the liberalisation of the agricultural markets, but this is beyond the scope of this paper

We note that this resistant place identity is not shared by all farmers. Some farmers in peri-urban areas are selling their lands for residential development, resettling in other areas or exiting farming altogether. However, the farmers interviewed for our study were not in this situation and were defending the legitimacy of agricultural uses in Wollondilly Shire, even though some explained that they did not have a successor, meaning that their farm would cease to exist once they exit farming.

Farmers build their ‘resistant’ place identity on the feeling of threatened *continuity* and enhanced *distinctiveness*. Indeed, they perceive themselves as a disappearing group. They often illustrate their point by explaining that professional and social interactions between farmers (e.g. information sharing), as well as the agricultural support industry are disappearing. However, they counterbalance their feelings of threatened continuity by insisting on their *distinctiveness* from non-farming landowners. Farmers often explain that they use the land for productive outputs, as well as to enable, in some cases, social reproduction, which they consider as an appropriate use of the land. On the other hand, they often describe non-farming landowners as using the land inappropriately, for several reasons. Firstly, practices such as fencing around their houses and mowing their lawns are considered ‘suburban’ and not suitable or poorly adapted to a rural area. One farmer expresses scepticism concerning the mowing of grass: “I couldn’t [...] see the point of having a massive parcel of land that I have to mow every two weeks. It’s a waste of time. I mean you need to grow things”, while another criticises the practice of fencing by non-farming residents: “they build a big house, a big mansion, and then put a fence around [it], which is, puts it on a block the same size as they moved out of Woollahra or Double Bay,⁷ and the rest of the land is neglected”. In the same vein, leisure activities such as motorbike riding are considered inappropriate. Secondly, the practices of non-farming landowners are often considered by farmers as impacting badly on the land. Indeed, many farmers talked about non-farming landowners (‘hobby farmers’) as bad carers of the animals and of the land, leading to overgrazing, poor animal health, weeds, birds and feral animal problems. For example, one farmer explains that some owners do not manage their land properly, which gives rise to feral animals and invasive species: “it’s generally owned by a person who is not connected with that land, or not knowledgeable as [to] how to minimize the impacts, and you get, you get a lot of weeds, you get feral animals you get a lot of invasive plant species”. Finally, many farmers feel that non-farming landowners have a mediated connection to the landscape, based on an appreciation of its aesthetics from their window, rather than on daily practices. One farmer explains: “they see the country as a picture, a landscape painted by Monet, the hay stakes in the paddocks [...] so yeah, they have this idealistic view of country life and they buy a property, they work in the city, and the grass grows”.

The resistant place identity that we infer from farmers’ views and perceptions does not appear to have sparked collective action yet. Our finding suggest that collective action that could renegotiate the role of farmers in the peri-urban Shire and lead to an *emergent* place identity is currently non-existent. However, several elements in planners’, farmers’ and members of the community’s discourses and actions point toward the possibility of such an emergent place identity. Below we discuss one salient element: ‘viability’.

Before discussing viability, we note that our analysis of farmer place identity in Wollondilly Shire narrowed down on the relationships of farmers with just one out-group, i.e. non-farming landowners. Farmers inherently hold rather more complex place identities, deeply rooted in the individual relationships they develop with their farm. Many factors beyond interaction with non-farming resident are at play here, including continuity between a farm and a family, self-esteem and self-efficacy. For example, a strong individual place identity can be based on continuity between the farm and the family, even in cases where the collective farming identity is in decline and farming is disappearing from the area. In such cases, farmers are often ready to substantially change their practices and modify their occupational identity. This is not the case of farmers whose relationship to their farm is based on self-esteem and self-efficacy only, and not on continuity. To understand farmers’ sense of future in the peri-urban and their ability to renegotiate their role in it, it would be necessary to also take into account these further aspects of their place identity. However, these aspects are beyond the scope of the current paper.

Possibilities of an emergent place identity?

In the previous sections we have shown that the productive dimension of the landscape is disappearing from the debate on what rurality is. However, this dismissal is challenged by some of the farmers, planners and managers interviewed, particularly around the definition of ‘viability’. Many rezoning proposals describe the land as ‘non-viable’ on the grounds that the land is too small or not productive enough. Conversely, our interviews with planners, managers and farmers suggest that the definition of viability used in rezoning proposals can be contested for several reasons. Regarding the size of the land, some interviewees suggested that farming in Australia is traditionally taken to mean broad-acre farming – a form of farming that is indeed no longer viable in Australia’s peri-urban spaces. As a result, many people consider peri-urban farming as non-viable in contexts where only smaller lots of land are available. One farmer was of the view that we have to reconsider ‘viable’ agriculture in the peri-urban by thinking about what type of agriculture might be supported by smaller blocks of land (2–5 acres). In addition, another farmer suggested that a small plot of land might not be viable on its own, but might become viable if attached to an already existing property: small plots of land could be leased to farmers as an addition to their existing operations, for grazing or cropping purposes, and could contribute to maintaining the farm viable. Regarding the productive capabilities of the land, the information currently used to assess land productivity in the context of rezoning proposals is an agricultural land capability classification developed for broad-acre farming. This classification may be less relevant –possibly

⁷ Inner city suburbs of Sydney, NSW.

even misleading - in a peri-urban context.

Thus, ‘viability’ is not a given, but is rather a construct with shifting meaning: it can be renegotiated, manipulated and adapted to a particular situation. One way to renegotiate the notion of viability could be through co-development, by farmers and agronomists, of a new definition of a viable land that would be more immediately relevant to the Wollondilly Shire than current land capability categories.

Summary

We distinguished two competing hegemonic place identities in the Shire, both asserting the *distinctiveness* of the Shire through its physical characteristics (*genius loci*) (Fig. 3). However, this distinctiveness is articulated around different representations: Council defends housing development *in proximity* to villages and towns (city-country divide), whereas the second hegemonic place identity defends low-density housing development *in the countryside* (hybridisation of rural landscape). Both place identities have influenced the development and physical appearance of the Shire, through various (planning) practices (rezoning proposals, family excisions, community titles and zoning ordinances). Both also contribute to the marginalisation of agricultural activities that are considered as out of place and a nuisance. This is visible in the physical landscape through the development of subdivisions at the edge of towns and villages and the development of low-density houses and non-traditional agricultural activities (e.g. ‘horsiculture’) throughout the countryside.

Furthermore, we identified a *resistant* place identity developed by farmers, based on their feelings of threatened continuity and

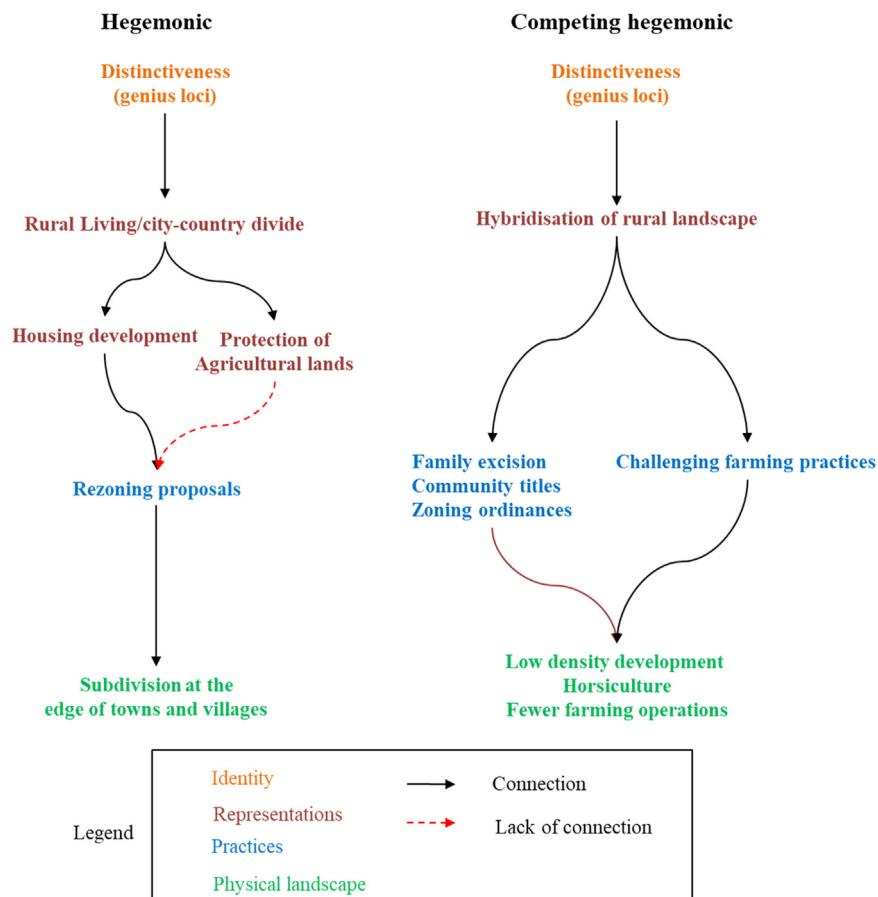


Fig. 3. Hegemonic place identities in Wollondilly Shire. The nature of the identity defended is represented in orange. The divergent representation of the landscape, one based on the compact city and the other on the hybridisation of the rural landscape is represented in red. The practices that enable the implementation of those place identities are in blue. The impacts of those place identities on the physical landscape is in green. (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

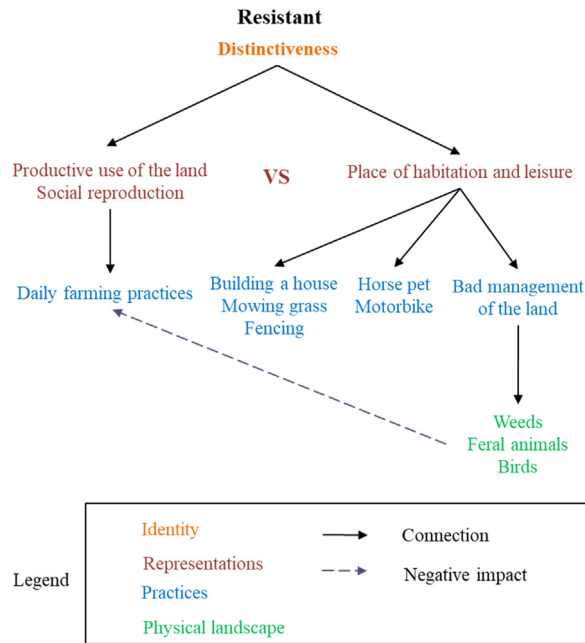


Fig. 4. Farmers' resistant place identity. The identity principle developed by farmer is represented in orange. The representations that reinforce that identity are represented in red. In blue, are the practices through which the representations of the landscape are enacted. In green is the impacts, on the physical landscape of non-farming landowners' practices. The purple arrow shows how they negatively impact farmers' daily farming practices. (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

enhanced distinctiveness from non-farming landowners (Fig. 4). This feeling of distinctiveness is articulated around a self-representation as using the land productively and for social reproduction. Farmers' representation of non-farming landowners is based on the latter group using the land for residential (e.g. building a house, mowing grass, fencing) and leisure uses (having a horse pet, riding a motorbike, having bad management practices), considered as illegitimate uses impacting negatively on the physical landscape (e.g. weeds, feral animals, birds). This resistant place identity has not yet led to farmers' collective action to renegotiate their role in the peri-urban. However, some farmers, planners and managers challenge the marginalisation of agricultural activities by calling for a re-definition of the notion of 'viability' of farming. Re-negotiating the notion of viability could potentially contribute to the renegotiation of the role of farming in the area, and the development of an emergent place identity.

Discussion and conclusion

Our framework of the politics of place/landscape identity served primarily as a heuristic device. It offered a nuanced, comprehensive understanding of the competing logics of development and the ensuing conflicts in peri-urban environments. It also offered insight into strategic priorities for planners (e.g. renegotiation of the notion of viability) that could help farmers to renegotiate their role in the peri-urban and lead to the transitioning of their current resistant place identity to a more positive emergent place identity.

Firstly, the politics of place/landscape identity framework enabled us to understand how the identity of the landscape, and specifically the question of maintaining the distinctiveness of the physical features of the landscape (*genius loci*), is used by different groups to promote competing visions of the development of the peri-urban landscape (development at the edge of towns and villages or low-density development throughout the countryside).

Secondly, the comprehensiveness of our framework, particularly its articulation of the relationships between representations and practices, allowed a nuanced understanding of how the 'politics of place/landscape identity' influence development in peri-urban environments. For example, focusing on both *representations* and *practices* enabled us to understand how Council's hegemonic place identity, aimed at enabling housing development while protecting farmland, is being used, in planning practices (rezoning proposals), to defend housing development as 'in place' and agricultural activities as 'out of place'. We offer this as a major contribution of our framework. The current literature on peri-urban conflict (Scott, 2008; Cadieux, 2008; Cadieux, Taylor, & Bunce, 2013; Foley & Scott, 2014) focuses on identification of competing discourses of rurality without necessarily providing insight on *how* these discourses translate (sometimes in a transgressed manner) to practices, to eventually influence the development of the material landscape.

In addition, our framework identified hegemonic and resistant place identities. Again focusing on the *articulation* of identity and representations with practices, we were able to identify those identities and representations of the peri-urban that influenced practices and eventually the appearance of the physical landscape. The two (hegemonic) place identities identified as competing were considered as such because they influence the development of the Shire. In contrast, farmers' place identity - arguably the result of

farmers' adaptation to changes in the physical landscape (e.g., increasing number of non-farming landowners), practices (leisure and residential uses) and representations (consumption landscape) - was defined as resistant as it has not led to collective action, changes in practices or in the physical landscape. We offer this insight as a second contribution of our framework as the current scholarly focus on competing discourses does not analyse whether those competing discourses influence practices and the physical landscape.

A further, arguably significant, contribution of the framework is that it points to strategic priorities and intervention points for planners and managers. In addition to demonstrating around which representations the hegemonic and resistant place identities in the peri-urban articulate themselves, the framework also identifies how those representations could be renegotiated to move toward an emergent place identity. In the simplified, and necessarily partial, presentation of our case study we observed how the notion of 'viability' is due for renegotiation and redefinition. Points to be raised in this renegotiation include, inter alia, the size of the land required to farm and the assessment of the agricultural capability of the land. Understanding *how* questions of competing identities are translated in representations, practices and the physical landscape can help practitioners to better understand *why* issues become conflicting, and what representations need to be renegotiated in order to create an emergent place identity.

Considering future research, our framework may be applied in other spatial planning contexts where conflict over uses of the land is manifest, for example in urban regeneration projects. For example, in Lees (2014)'s study the discourse of urban regeneration presents itself as aiming to reintegrate neighbourhoods (described as derelict and crime ridden) into the city through the development of regeneration plans (practices). These plans are to change the physical landscape (e.g. new retail areas and cafes) in ways that can be considered hegemonic. This hegemonic representation of urban regeneration is challenged by residents who consider it a hidden agenda for gentrification. Their alternate representation of their neighbourhood is based on its positive aspects, and defends a place identity based on continuity between themselves and their neighbourhood. Our framework is in principle applicable to such urban contexts and may assist in eliciting intervention points for residents and planners. In addition, we found that there is sometimes a need to articulate both collective and individual place identity to better understand the politics of place/landscape identity. This was the case for farmers whose individual place identity (relationship with their farm) sheds new light on their possible future in the peri-urban. We would therefore encourage additional research on the articulation of individual and collective place identities within our framework.

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