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Editorial

## Editorial: re-countryside

Fabian Neuhaus,<sup>1,\*</sup> Natalie Robertson<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, University of Calgary, Canada

\* Correspondence: [fabian.neuhaus@ucalgary.ca](mailto:fabian.neuhaus@ucalgary.ca); [nsrobert@ucalgary.ca](mailto:nsrobert@ucalgary.ca)

**Guest Editors: Fabian Neuhaus and Natalie Robertson, University of Calgary, Calgary, AB, Canada**

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If we define 'the countryside' based on the mental images conjured when using that term, we ignore the reality of international supply chains, jobs and employment, transportation, resource consumption, wildlife migration and even historical context. It would be simpler if the countryside was everything the city is not, and vice versa, but this dichotomy does not exist in a world full of subtleties, overlaps and contradictions. And so, the boundaries between urban and rural, both material and intellectual, are porous – or at least they should be. In the same way that rigid definitions of nebulous concepts are only useful in superficial discussions, recognising boundaries only as hard edges undermines deeper contextual understanding. Boundaries aren't just jurisdictional; they can be historical, emotional, philosophical and maybe even performative.

As structures, boundaries can enable social constructions and community. In his keynote address at the 2022 AMPS conference, *Cultures, Communities and Design* in Calgary, Canada, Willi Ermine shared his concept of ethical spaces. He argued that space is an act of creating or creativity, and he explored the magnificence of the natural and the human world focusing on experiences made up of encounters. With this, he positioned humans as 'experiencers' – but, crucially, experiencers with agency and the ability to create experiences and encounters consciously and deliberately. The ethical space is just such an encounter – one that enables meeting and coming together from different directions. Ermine stressed that ethical space is about how we treat sentient beings and the metaphysical background. In this context, boundaries become obsolete because experiences and encounters transcend time and space through memories or even through Wi-Fi networks.

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The articles in this volume explore concepts and perceptions relating to the countryside, but we invite readers to overlay their own ideas about boundaries as they read. Here, the countryside is defined and understood through a variety of different lenses framed by embedded ideas about the nature of boundaries. On a very basic level, this helps frame the discussion – but framing is in the eye of the beholder and therefore invites speculation as to how *reframing* might impact on discourse about the countryside and boundaries. Leemans, Van Daele and Gheysen leverage this reframing in their discussion about infrastructural networks in the Eurometropolis Lille–Kortrijk–Tournai (EM) region.<sup>1</sup> This region, with a shared cultural and industrial history across the France–Belgium border, not only blurs distinctions between urban and rural and ignores international boundaries; it also creates a new boundary definition tied to historical cultural roots and current technological trajectories. Defining edges using a shared history introduces the opportunity to recognise boundaries as a product of time as well as place and, with that, highlighting their impermanence and fluidity. As Mayer and Bernbaum trace the history of Banff National Park, we are reminded that this park’s current edges are based on territoriality and resource exploitation in various forms.<sup>2</sup> These edges only include recent cultural interpretations of the area and ignore its long precolonial history. This region – its flora, fauna, geology and water – creates its own boundaries that exclude and include humans through natural processes that produce shifting accessibility tied to seasonal changes or yearly fluctuations untethered to quantitative, geodetic reference points. These boundaries are of a time and place and are in a state of constant change, crossing back and forth between the predictable and the unstable. Ioannou explores similar ideas unfolding in Eryri (Snowdonia), Wales.<sup>3</sup> Tracing a centuries-long evolution in thinking about wild landscapes, boundaries here are not economic and geographic but emotional and intellectual. They are boundaries defined by humanity’s understanding of its relationship to nature; boundaries that are dissolving under the threat of climate change.

For Klein-Hewett, boundaries define decisions guiding investment by outlining the edges of opportunity: what is worth investing in because of its location.<sup>4</sup> This is not dissimilar to the Banff example; however, the boundaries here are defined artificially and tied to scope – and, in many cases, when the project is complete boundaries are eliminated. These boundaries also help define ‘success’ and are tied, again, to arbitrary ideas about usage and legacy in more abstract terms. In this way, the edges and boundaries of these rural projects decide where the rain falls but not who gets wet.

Though these four articles are very different, they maintain a similar economic subtext questioning the nature of our relationship to land outside cities and its use. The boundaries at the centre of each article, though occupying different degrees of fluidity across time, are based largely on an economic understanding of the areas under examination. As Ermine encouraged us to step into the future by consciously creating encounters and, in so doing, designing cultures and communities in collaboration with the countryside, we are reminded of the power that less tangible perspectives of land, whether rural or urban, offer us as ‘experiencers’.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Leemans, Van Daele and Gheysen, ‘Mapping the lifelines’.

<sup>2</sup>Mayer and Bernbaum, ‘Defining *Wilderness*’.

<sup>3</sup>Ioannou, ‘Towards a reframing of Eryri’.

<sup>4</sup>Klein-Hewett, ‘Rural parks in neoliberal America’.

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