

(RE)UNITING CITY AND COUNTRY: NEW RESEARCH ON URBAN AND SUBURBAN SOCIO-TOPOGRAPHICAL STRUCTURES

British School at Rome, via Gramsci, 61 - 00197 Roma (RM)

Thursday 14th – Friday 15th November 2024

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Call for Papers

This conference explores the relationship between cities and their peri-urban and rural surroundings and wants to reflect on the methodological challenges involved in understanding topographical patterns and material evidence in socio-historical terms as indicators of a lived experience.

Research on the relationship between city and country, centre and periphery, metropolis and hinterland, was for long conceptualised in binary oppositions. Yet it is now clear that the hierarchical thinking and assumption of one-directional transfer of knowledge and goods that informed these concepts are oversimplistic. They ignore aspects of reciprocity and the difficulty to pin down exactly where the borderline between centre and periphery should be drawn.

To be sure, oppositions abound in Greek and Latin literature where the two spheres are contrasted in various ways. Yet beyond literary *topoi*, the situation is far more ambiguous and complex. The 'simple' country life members of the Roman élite enjoyed was in fact a romanticised lifestyle that had nothing to do with the living conditions of ordinary peasants. Inhabitants of both city and countryside boasted various levels of education or economic power. Goods were not just moving from the countryside into the 'consumer city', but also in the opposite direction. In practical terms, identifying any boundaries between city and country, centre and periphery is difficult if not impossible. Certainly, city walls or the *pomerium* of Roman towns provided some structure, for instance defining what a villa is as opposed to a *domus*, or where it was permitted to bury one's dead. Yet the confines of a *pomerium* could change, enclosing tombs inside that used to be outside.

Not all cities had city walls, and where they did exist, they could be outgrown as in Rome or Pompeii, pushing the boundaries of the densely inhabited areas further out. Elsewhere, the inhabited area may be significantly smaller than the area surrounded by walls, and even where the more densely inhabited areas are neatly enclosed in walls, the latter had to be permeable to sustain daily life. Ignoring juridical and ritual boundaries, which were often poorly visible and arguably had little impact on the daily life of inhabitants, city boundaries are often ill-defined. Such difficulties are also reflected in terminological struggles of more recent scholarship that accepts topographical continuity between city and country. The areas between the city centre with its administrative and religious institutions and the countryside inhabited by peasants and dominated by agricultural production, are variously described as e.g. peri-urban, sub-urban, urban periphery etc. with none of these terms being universally accepted as adequate.

This conference is interested in describing aspects of continuity between city and country from two points of view:

1. A more nuanced understanding of the physical and social realities, and of how space shapes and is being shaped by people and their (inter-)action.
 - To what extent was there continuity between city and country?
 - What conditions determined the degree of permeability of any existing boundaries?
 - To the extent that clear boundaries did not exist, or did not determine urban and social structures, can the phenomena be better described as a zoning of activities and lifestyles around city centres?
 - Or do we rather find irregular clusters?

- What are the factors (physical/geographical or social) that determined the activities in those zones or clusters?
 - How did they change over time, in the short (day/daily), medium (seasonal), or long term (years/centuries)?
2. How to research such questions, and how to talk about them.
- How important is an adequate terminology and what should it be?
 - How do we get from archaeological maps to a description of a lived-in environment?
 - Given that the full complexity of a phenomenological approach to the evidence involves a vast range and number of data, how can these be accommodated?
 - Considering that the evidence is always going to be incomplete, and that many key activities never left any material traces in the first place, what is the level of uncertainty we can tolerate when asking such bigger questions?
 - To what extent can we fill the gaps through comparative studies?
 - To what extent is socio-geographical theory helpful?

The conference is linked to the ERC-ADG-funded project [IN-ROME](#) (101054143) that aims at answering many of the questions outlined above with regard to imperial Rome outside the Servian Walls and within a range of c.9 miles. Yet the conference seeks to address these questions by also studying other places and time periods. Papers will be 20 minutes long and we are planning to publish the proceedings.

Submission Guidelines: Please submit your title and 300-400-word abstract as a PDF file by email to francesca.dandrea@sns.it and consuelo.manetta@sns.it. The **deadline for submission is July 15, 2024**. We will notify applicants of our decisions by the end of July.