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The politics of place identity in  
peri-urban environments. What role for  
productive farming landscapes? A case  
study of Wollondilly Shire, NSW,  
Australia

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By

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## CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>List of Tables</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 Setting the scene</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1 Part 1: Contextualising peri-urban farming . . . . .	9
2.1.1 The (neo)liberalisation of the Australian agricultural market . . . . .	10
2.1.1.1 Nature of the neoliberal measures . . . . .	11
2.1.1.2 Impacts of neoliberal policies on farmers . . . . .	12
2.1.2 Planning: Sydney Metropolitan Strategies and the protection of peri-urban lands . . . . .	14
2.1.2.1 The food system . . . . .	15
2.1.2.2 Orientations of the past Metropolitan Strategies . . . . .	18
2.1.3 A Plan for Sydney 2036 and A Plan for Growing Sydney . . . . .	24
2.1.3.1 The neoliberal project of the Global City . . . . .	25
2.1.3.2 Government as supporting private sector to provide housing . . . . .	25
2.1.3.3 The Compact City: integrating housing development and protection of the environment? . . . . .	26
2.1.3.4 The protection of peri-urban agriculture and the sus- tainability agenda . . . . .	29
2.1.4 The peri-urban challenge . . . . .	33
2.1.4.1 "Suburbs in waiting" or third space . . . . .	33
2.1.4.2 Peri-urban areas: between intensification and multi- functionality . . . . .	38

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

2.1.4.3	Competing discourses of rurality: a non-stabilised peri-urban identity . . . . .	41
2.2	Part 2: A politics of place/landscape identity framework . . . . .	44
2.2.1	Place and landscape . . . . .	44
2.2.1.1	Place: from an individual to a collective conceptualisation . . . . .	46
2.2.1.2	Landscape: from a visual to an embedded and political conceptualisation . . . . .	49
2.2.1.3	The question of identity in place and landscape studies . . . . .	54
2.2.2	Place and landscape models: interconnections . . . . .	58
2.2.3	Practices, representations and physical landscape: uni- or bi-directional connection? . . . . .	62
2.2.4	Integrating the notion of identity: social representations and identity . . . . .	63
2.2.5	Synthesis: a framework of the politics of place/landscape identity . . . . .	65
<b>3</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>69</b>
3.1	A few words about the author . . . . .	69
3.2	A constructionist approach . . . . .	70
3.3	A critical enquiry . . . . .	71
3.4	Beyond critical enquiry: looking for possible futures . . . . .	73
3.5	Case study approach . . . . .	74
3.6	Methods . . . . .	77
3.6.1	Interviews . . . . .	78
3.6.2	Document analysis . . . . .	80
3.7	Data collection . . . . .	82
3.7.1	Interviews . . . . .	82
3.7.2	Document analysis . . . . .	84
3.8	Analysis . . . . .	84
3.8.1	Analysis of farmers' interviews . . . . .	84
3.8.2	Analysis of planners' and managers' interviews and document analysis . . . . .	89
3.9	Assessing quality . . . . .	90
3.9.1	Triangulation . . . . .	90
3.9.2	Generalisation . . . . .	91
3.9.3	Negative cases and chain of evidence . . . . .	92



3.10 Ethical considerations . . . . .	92
<b>4 Hegemonic place identities in Wollondilly Shire</b>	<b>95</b>
4.1 Rural living: an inclusive representation of rurality . . . . .	99
4.1.1 Rural living as a vision for housing development and protection of farming . . . . .	99
4.1.2 Housing development as ‘in place’ . . . . .	103
4.1.3 Productive landscapes as ‘out of place’ . . . . .	106
4.1.3.1 Agriculture as non-viable . . . . .	106
4.1.3.2 "Use it otherwise you lose it" . . . . .	109
4.1.4 Housing demand forecasts as the dominant rationality of planning?	113
4.1.4.1 The dominance of a housing development discourse tied to housing forecasts . . . . .	114
4.1.4.2 Rezoning proposals: housing development vs. protection of farmlands, an uphill battle . . . . .	116
4.2 The dissolution of the city–country divide? . . . . .	122
4.2.1 The hybridisation of the rural landscape . . . . .	123
4.2.1.1 Family excision and community titles: introducing rural-residential uses in rural lands . . . . .	123
4.2.1.2 Zoning ordinances: authorising a wide range of uses . . .	123
4.2.1.3 Changes in the physical landscape . . . . .	124
4.2.1.4 Hybridisation of the rural landscape and farmers’ eco- nomic viability . . . . .	125
4.2.2 A representation of rurality that transgresses the city–country divide . . . . .	126
4.2.2.1 Scale and density . . . . .	127
4.2.2.2 A battle of identities . . . . .	127
4.2.3 Challenging the legitimacy of farming practices in the peri-urban landscape . . . . .	128
4.2.3.1 Challenging the legitimacy of farming practices . . . . .	129
4.2.3.2 Consequences for farming operations . . . . .	130
4.3 Synthesis . . . . .	132
<b>5 Farmers’ resistant place identity: continuity and distinctiveness</b>	<b>135</b>
5.1 Threatened group continuity . . . . .	138
5.2 Nuancing the idea of threatened group continuity . . . . .	142

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

5.3	Enhanced distinctiveness . . . . .	144
5.3.1	Landscape of production vs. landscape of consumption . . . . .	144
5.3.2	Non-farming landowners' practices as inappropriate . . . . .	147
5.3.3	Negative effects on farmers of the modification of the physical landscape . . . . .	148
5.4	Farmers' response: weak collective organisation . . . . .	152
5.4.1	Weak bridging social capital . . . . .	153
5.4.2	Weak bonding social capital . . . . .	155
5.5	Synthesis . . . . .	157
<b>6</b>	<b>Arrangements: the indications of an emergent place identity in Wol-</b> <b>londilly Shire?</b>	<b>159</b>
6.1	Farmers' arrangements: changing practices and emergent place identity .	162
6.2	Sourcing by-products: enhancing farmers' viability and challenging the city–country divide . . . . .	165
6.2.1	Sourcing by-products as enhancing economic viability . . . . .	165
6.2.2	Rethinking the city–country relationship . . . . .	166
6.3	Leasing: a re-legitimation of farmers' presence in the countryside? . . . .	168
6.3.1	Leasing arrangements as a way to regain access to land and connecting farmers and non-farmers . . . . .	168
6.3.2	Is leasing contributing to an emergent place identity? . . . . .	169
6.4	Preventing conflicts with non-farming landowners: renegotiating the legitimacy of farming practices? . . . . .	173
6.5	Farmers' markets: empowering farmers? . . . . .	176
6.5.1	Farmers' market as empowering farmers, enhancing economic viability and creating relationships between farmers and non- farmers . . . . .	176
6.5.2	Challenging the alternative nature of farmers' markets . . . . .	180
6.6	Synthesis . . . . .	185
<b>7</b>	<b>The role of place identity in determining farmers' vision of the future</b> <b>of their farms</b>	<b>191</b>
7.1	Adaptive strategies . . . . .	194
7.2	Traditional and modern farmers . . . . .	198
7.3	Land-based place identity: the importance of continuity . . . . .	201
7.3.1	The farm and the family . . . . .	201

7.3.2	The farm as a means to achieve personal goals . . . . .	204
7.4	Practice-based place identity: self-esteem . . . . .	207
7.4.1	The farm as a personal creation . . . . .	207
7.4.2	The "good farmer" as an environmental farmer . . . . .	208
7.5	Practice-based place identity: self-efficacy . . . . .	211
7.5.1	Farming as a lifestyle . . . . .	212
7.5.2	Farming as a challenge . . . . .	213
7.6	Place identities and adaptive strategies . . . . .	216
7.6.1	Combined place identity and adaptive strategies . . . . .	216
7.6.1.1	Adaptive strategies . . . . .	216
7.6.1.2	Continuity and adaptive strategies . . . . .	218
7.6.1.3	Modification of the occupational identity . . . . .	219
7.6.1.4	A positive vision of the future of the farm in a peri-urban context . . . . .	221
7.6.2	Practice-based place identity and adaptive strategies . . . . .	223
7.6.2.1	Adaptive strategies . . . . .	224
7.6.2.2	Land owners who see farming as an individual passion . . . . .	225
7.6.2.3	Lessees who see farming as one opportunity among others . . . . .	226
7.7	Synthesis . . . . .	227
<b>8</b>	<b>Discussion</b>	<b>231</b>
8.1	Politics of place in the literature: the city–country divide, and the consumption and production landscape . . . . .	232
8.2	Politics of place identity in Wollondilly Shire . . . . .	233
8.2.1	Hegemonic and resistant place identities . . . . .	234
8.2.2	Emergent place identity: toward a multifunctional countryside? . . . . .	236
8.2.3	Barriers and limitations to the creation of a multifunctional emergent place identity . . . . .	239
8.3	Identifying ways forward . . . . .	241
8.4	What did we learn about the role of identity in peri-urban areas? . . . . .	247
8.4.1	Place identity for understanding the forces influencing development and the reproduction of hegemonic place identities in the peri-urban . . . . .	248
8.4.2	Representations and practices as a way to identify how hegemonic and resistant place identities are reproduced . . . . .	248

TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

8.4.3	New practices as possibilities for an emergent place identity . . . .	250
8.4.4	Farmers' place identity, new practices and emergent place identity	251
8.4.5	New insights into farmers' decision making . . . . .	251
8.5	Limitations . . . . .	254
<b>9</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>257</b>
	<b>Appendix A</b>	<b>267</b>
	<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>278</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>TABLE</b>	<b>Page</b>
2.1 The characteristics of the compact city as described by (Westerink et al., 2013). . . . .	27
2.2 Definitions of the Biodiversity Certification and the Biodiversity Banking Offset Scheme . . . . .	31
2.3 Summary of the policies aiming at the preservation of peri-urban farmlands and farming activities in A Plan for Sydney 2036 and in A Plan for Growing Sydney. . . . .	32
2.4 Definitions of the concepts of peri-urbanisation, rurbanisation, exurbanisation and counter-urbanisation. . . . .	35
2.5 Definitions of post-productivist and multi-functionality (Argent, 2002; Holmes, 2006). . . . .	40
2.6 Summary of the different dimensions of place and landscape and their relationships as described in various place or landscape models. . . . .	61
3.1 The Gateway process. . . . .	81
3.2 Participation of farmers for each interview. . . . .	83
4.1 Characteristics of "rural living" and policies related to spatial development in Wollondilly Shire (Wollondilly Shire Council, 2011a). . . . .	101
4.2 Characteristics of "rural living" and policies related to the preservation of the agricultural landscape in Wollondilly Shire (Wollondilly Shire Council, 2011a) . . . . .	102
4.3 Arguments used in rezoning proposals to depict agricultural lands as 'out of place' in the Wollondilly Shire. . . . .	111
4.4 Arguments used by the Department of Planning and Environment to justify its approval of the rezoning proposals despite the proposals being inconsistent with the S117 Direction 1.2 Rural Zones. . . . .	118

LIST OF TABLES

---

6.1	Diverse economies framework of Gibson-Graham (2006). . . . .	183
7.1	Summary of the different adjustments or adaptive strategies to structural changes and peri-urban constraints identified in the literature. . . . .	196
7.2	Characteristics of ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ farmers’ relationships to their farms. . . . .	201
7.3	Farmers’ place identities: combined place identity and practice-based place identity. . . . .	215

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>FIGURE</b>	<b>Page</b>
2.1 Chronology of Sydney Metropolitan Strategies. . . . .	24
2.2 The monocentric model of peri-urban areas. . . . .	36
2.3 The polycentric model of peri-urban areas. . . . .	37
2.4 Chronology of the conceptualisations of place/landscape, and dimensions of the notion of place/landscape conceptualisation adopted in the study. . . . .	54
2.5 Conceptualisations of identity as a feature of a person (identity principles) and as the physical characteristics of a place (genius loci). . . . .	65
2.6 Dimensions of politics of place/landscape identity. . . . .	66
2.7 Politics of place/landscape identity framework. . . . .	68
3.1 Case study area . . . . .	77
4.1 Politics of place identity framework. . . . .	97
4.2 Housing development at the fringe of Picton, Wollondilly Shire, NSW, Australia. . . . .	100
4.3 Map of land zoned rural (RU1, RU2 and RU4) and the Agricultural Land Classification of the Department of Primary Industries (Class 1,2,3,4 and 5) in the Wollondilly Shire. . . . .	108
4.4 Representation of the first hegemonic place identity in the Wollondilly Shire. . . . .	112
4.5 Representation of the associated techniques which explain why housing development is favoured over the protection of agricultural lands in rezoning proposals. . . . .	121
4.6 Low density development scattered throughout rural lands in Wollondilly Shire, NSW, Australia. Image retrieved from Google Earth . . . . .	128
4.7 Representation of the second hegemonic place identity in Wollondilly Shire. . . . .	132

LIST OF FIGURES

---

5.1	Politics of place identity framework. In orange, the resistant moment, which is the moment we focus on in this chapter. . . . .	136
5.2	Farmers' resistant place identity based on the identity principle of a (threatened) continuity. . . . .	141
5.3	Farmers' resistant place identity based on the identity principle of distinctiveness. . . . .	152
6.1	Politics of place identity framework. In orange, the emergent moment, which is the moment we focus on in this chapter. . . . .	160
6.2	Representation of the four arrangements identified in Wollondilly Shire on two axes. . . . .	164
6.3	Representation of how the arrangements contribute in renegotiating some elements of the two hegemonic place identities. . . . .	187
7.1	Politics of place identity framework. In orange, the emergent moment, which is the moment we focus on in this chapter. . . . .	193
7.2	Farmers' place identities based on the concept of continuity. . . . .	204
7.3	Farmers' place identity based on the concept of self-esteem. . . . .	211
7.4	Farmers' place identity based on the concept of self-efficacy. . . . .	214



## ABSTRACT

**P**eri-urban farmlands in the Sydney basin are progressively being taken over by housing developments. In addition, the viability of peri-urban agricultural operations is undermined by the liberalisation of agriculture in Australia. Finally, the arrival of newcomers and the associated loss of the farmers' central position in peri-urban communities lead to the emergence of competing discourse on the peri-urban. Due to these mutations, peri-urban Sydney, like many other peri-urban landscapes worldwide, has become a contested space, where different social groups develop conflicting representations of what the 'identity' of peri-urban areas is.

This thesis examines, through a case study of Wollondilly Shire, how farmlands and farming activities are marginalised in the peri-urban and how this trend might be reversed. To do so, a holistic framework of the 'politics of place/landscape identity' was developed, offering a heuristic tool for understanding how hegemonic, resistant and emergent place identities are produced in the peri-urban landscape.

Two hegemonic place identities were identified, both contributing (sometimes inadvertently) to the marginalisation of agricultural activities. The first identity proposes to accommodate housing development while preserving agricultural uses through the maintenance of a sharp distinction between city and country. However, in planning practices, this rationale is used to characterise housing development as 'in place' and agricultural activities as 'out of place'. The second identity promotes the development of low-density residential development throughout the countryside, leading to a consideration of farming as a nuisance in the landscape. Furthermore, a resistant place identity defended by farmers was identified, which aimed at reasserting farmers' legitimacy in the peri-urban landscape, by considering farmers as using the land appropriately. As of yet, this resistant place identity has not sparked collective action amongst farmers and, therefore, does not renegotiate their roles in the peri-urban. Rather, farmers have developed formal and informal arrangements with various stakeholders, as well as adaptive strategies at the farm scale, which might lead to a renegotiation of their role in the peri-urban.

In the discussion, barriers that might prevent the renegotiation of the role of farming in the peri-urban are identified, as well as ways to address them. Levers for policy change that were identified include the need to renegotiate the meaning of the notion of viability and move beyond a spatial planning based on the city-country divide. Actions that could be taken by farmers and the civil society are also identified.

