

Settlement Patterns Surrounding US and UK Cities: The Challenge of Protecting the Countryside (11)

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This paper is concerned with that type of sprawl commonly referred to as leapfrog or overspill development - housing that has been constructed, contrary to local policy intentions, beyond a community's designated growth areas.

Holding development in this rural area to 5-10% of the area's housing supply has been demonstrated in the author's earlier research to be an attainable containment goal based on what a number of the leading US communities have been able to achieve.

Other research by this author found a surprising result when containment rates in US communities are compared to their counterparts in England. There is actually more decentralization of housing to the English countryside than is found in the US. The dominant image, however, of the English countryside is of a relatively undeveloped "green and pleasant land". How is it possible to have these apparent opposites coexist? It is because a high percentage of English housing is located in town and villages.

The current paper again compares US and UK communities but takes a closer look at the geographic pattern of housing in rural areas surrounding cities in each country. The goals are to better describe this phenomenon and to raise important policy questions that have received relatively little attention in the US and which are an emerging problem in Europe (Urban Sprawl: The Ignored Challenge, European Environment Agency Report No. 10/2006). If a significant amount of leapfrog development continues outside US cities, are there patterns in which this housing would be less objectionable than conventional large lot/low density sprawl? Do US communities need to have policies and plans for guiding this rural housing more similar to European counties or is it sufficient to simply declare the area outside the urban growth boundary "off limits" and to hope for the best? Are European policies working in today's context? What do US, UK and EU countries have to share on this important dimension of spatial planning and land use policy.

The database upon which this research is based is the most recent Census from the US and the UK. Statistical analysis and GIS mapping are at the block (US) and output area (UK) levels.