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The materialization of intangible transcending landscape functions – the role of spatial and territorial competences

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From a landscape ecological point of view, the sustainability of landscapes should be judged according to the joint effects of material processes pertaining to the combined functions of the landscape. Ecosystem services are related to material processes such as ion exchange by soils, habitat requirements for flora and fauna, etc. Land use functions are likewise related to ecosystem processes such as photosynthesis, nutrient cycling, water fluxes etc. A significant part of the commonly accepted landscape functions are not, however, related to material processes. Landscape functions such as aesthetics, cultural history or spiritual meaning are intangible and usually require a relation to a specific cultural context to be perceived. In addition, visions, ideas and plans collectively referred to as symbolic transactions that are superimposed to landscapes constitute intangible functions. Though not tangible in the landscape, these symbolic transactions (e.g. designations, zonations, property delineations) certainly add functions to the landscape. Such perceived or designated functions are denoted as transcending functions. In order for transcending functions to be materialized, action must be taken by actors with the ability to regulate processes in the concrete landscape (actors with territorial competence (Hägerstrand 1995)). This paper analyses the means by which transcending functions are materialized by the conversion of symbolic transactions to material land use or land service functions in the landscape. This conversion is analysed within the theoretical framework of Brandt & Vejre (2004) and Hägerstrand (1995) in four case areas on the urban fringe of Copenhagen. In Søllerød Nature Park, restrictions based on the Nature Protection Act of 1937 were imposed on designated land areas, and later territorial competence was acquired by public land acquisitions. In Vestskoven, territorial competence has been acquired by the Government by land acquisitions within a designated area from 1967. In both cases, the land use differs strongly between the designated areas and the adjacent urban areas, and neighbouring areas are urbanized in contrast to the forested or open countryside landscapes within the designation. In Hjortespring green belt, a designation from 1947 has largely failed, because of a lack of conscious gain of territorial competence by the authorities. The proposed green belt has been fragmented by urbanization. The Gundsø case illustrates the contemporary problem – the front of urban sprawl is about to enter this area. It is concluded that the materialization of intangible transcending functions is possible if the symbolic transactions are followed by the careful acquisition of territorial competence. This acquisition may follow many scenarios depending on the relative role and kinds of land ownership and means of regulation. It is discussed whether the acquisition of a protected countryside in the urban fringe requires spatial competence. The three first cases illustrate the implementation of the Copenhagen finger plan, the containment of urban sprawl in the post-war era by simple legal and planning tools. The last case illustrates the present situation – the potential post-industrial urbanization zone that will be subject to urban pressure in the next decade. It is discussed how territorial and spatial competences are distributed in a neo-liberal phase, with emphasis on voluntary solutions and decentralization, and how open space can be preserved in the context of urban sprawl.