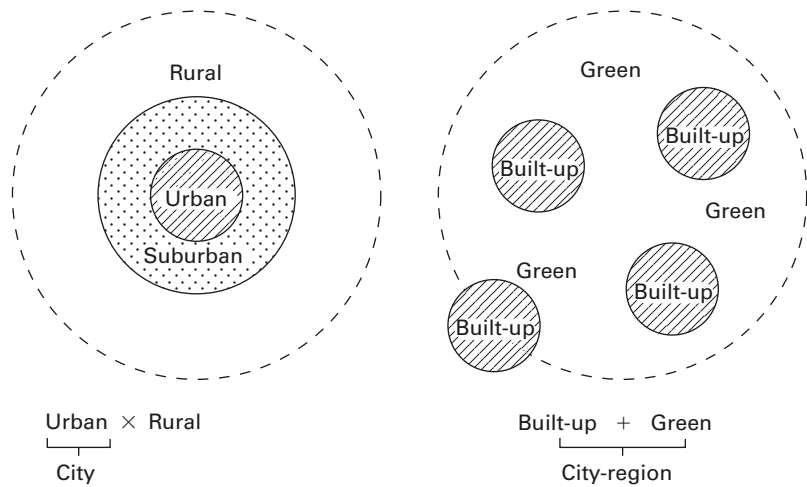


Ascher, who theorized that urban functions should be diffused over the entire region but with the physical distinction of urban and rural areas, introducing the theory of 'Metapolis' (Ascher, 1995). Jacobs, whose work has centred on the city as the measurable form, developed her theory of the city-region as an economic functional unit in her work, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* (1984).

Especially in densely populated territories, such as those in which Tokyo and Randstad are located, the distinction between the urban and the rural is losing its meaning. Rural areas do not necessarily depend economically on agriculture. Due to a highly developed transport infrastructure and the information society, urban functions are increasingly spread out over a wider urban- and/or rural-region. Regions or city-regions are arising both as a framework for sustainable planning and for policy-making (Orlfield, 1997; Simmonds and Hack, 2000; Salet *et al.*, 2003). The urbanization process has been described as a series of consecutive stages. Suburbanization, which has historically occurred in many cities after the initial phase of urbanization, has been perceived as a physical invasion of the rural by the urban. Urban sprawl 'occurs not on a *tabula rasa* landscape but rather on a peopled and working rural landscape' (Savage and Lapping, 2003). Such counter-urbanization has taken place for different reasons which may range from poor living conditions, to nationally planned suburban developments, to the pursuit of a perceived higher quality of life away from the city. With counter-urbanization (suburbanization, de-urbanization or whatever term is used to describe the movement of people away from the city), urban functions spread homogeneously, arguably weakening both urban and rural characteristics. It then becomes more difficult to distinguish between an urban and a rural area, at least if judged by the economic activities, and the services and facilities provided.

If reurbanization follows counter-urbanization, it has been argued that a cyclical process of urbanization is complete, leading towards sustainable development (Hall and Hay, 1980). However, the transition from counter-urbanization to reurbanization does not seem to be a simple enough process for clear parameters to be identified in the urbanization process. In his research on regional systems in North Italy, Dematteis detected that 'between 1980 and 1990, this urban de-concentration (de-urbanization) process continues, but in a more selective way which can be described as 'concentrated

Figure 3.1
The urbanization process and
the city-region.



de-concentration' (1998). If a city-region is considered as a framework, this phenomenon can be analysed more effectively. Furthermore, a framework can facilitate the identification of those qualitative characteristics of the urban and rural, and the symbiosis between built-up and green areas. This is becoming more and more pressing as the distinction between urban and rural continues to blur (see Figure 3.1).

Randstad and Tokyo: spatial configuration

The significance of the city-region varies at different scales. At the local level, it is possible to find examples of several municipalities cooperating in order to reach a critical mass of 200,000–300,000 inhabitants, which is enough to support sophisticated urban functions. In France, *Communautés d'Agglomération*, or municipal coalitions, are established to reach a mass of 15,000 inhabitants. In Japan, many municipality unifications are negotiated in order to reach a mass of 150,000–300,000 inhabitants, which, it is suggested, will maximize administrative efficiency. At the other end of the scale, city-regions on a mega-regional level are emerging, such as the 'blue banana' which covers the area from London to France and Italy, and aspires to be a mega-region with 80 million inhabitants (Brunet, 1989) (Figure 3.2). Another example is the *Japanese Pacific Belt* which stretches from Tokyo through Nagoya and Osaka to Fukuoka for a distance of about 800 km. In Europe, 'at the broadest geographical scale, there is continued growth of