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Editorial

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## Editorial

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The first issue of Urban Research and Practice was published in March 2008, 1 year after the Leipzig Charta on Sustainable Urban Development had been signed. Twelve years have passed, and we have a new Leipzig Charta published in December 2020 under the German EU presidency (as well as the Territorial Agenda for the EU). This coincides with a change in the editorship of the journal as Professor Rob Atkinson, who has been editor since the first issue in 2008, stands down and hands over the role to Professor Karsten Zimmermann. In this context, the editorial board of Urban Research & Practice thought that this might be a good time to look back and reflect on the development and evolution of the journal.

The idea to launch a new journal with a specific focus on urban development and urban policies emerged in the context of the European Urban Research Association (EURA), a network of European scholars working together on urban issues since 1997. Following the goals of the association, the journal wanted to open a new and interdisciplinary academic forum to publish and discuss findings from research, practical and policy experiences on cities – not only, but largely with a focus on Europe. At the outset, the editor of the journal, Rob Atkinson from the University of the West of England, summarized the objectives of the journal as follows:

“Though the journal has a general focus on urban policies, we have deliberately adopted a wide definition of this term, and we will seek to address the following areas:

- A focus on ‘urban’ issues (e.g., race/ethnicity, immigration, employment/unemployment, poverty/social exclusion, quality of life; segregation and social polarisation, urban democracy and community involvement; spatial planning; the urban environment; uneven economic development at all levels, from the global to the local, that impacts on urban areas);
- Studies of the interdynamics between cities and their surroundings; the growth of metropolitan regions and their impacts in a wider political and economic context;
- Urban policy developments – at European national, regional and local levels, as well as outside Europe – regarding:

- economic developments and policies that have a specific impact on urban areas;
- spatial developments and spatial planning and housing policies that have an impact on urban areas;
- developments and policies that have an impact on the urban environment and urban sustainability;”

In addition to the traditional role of journals publishing academic papers Urban Research & Practice (UR&P) also wanted to make a contribution to bridging the gaps between academic, professional and policy interests, to inform public debate, improve the quality of urban policy, and offer a space to raise the visibility of emerging issues in relation to urban matters. We did so by including a policy section and a practice section. In these sections, practitioners as well as academics were invited to submit papers that are less theory driven but address current policy developments and innovative actions at local or city level. We still feel that these two sections are a unique feature of the journal.

The first group of editors also highlighted the relevance and necessity of ‘comparative studies of urban issues and urban policy in European countries (either across or within countries) and elsewhere’ (Atkinson 2008, 2). More generally, the journal hoped to:

... contribute to the general understanding of developments across Europe and worldwide that are shaping our urban areas in a world that is becoming increasingly urbanised and in which new and exciting urban forms are emerging. (ibid, p.2)

As the journal has developed over the years we hope that it has, at least in part, managed to achieve this aim.

While there was a specific focus on European cities, the journal also wanted to encourage variation-finding comparisons, taking into consideration European-wide and global factors that impacted on urban areas, urban policies, and urban governance. This intention was clearly a result of the discourse on the ‘European City’ and ‘European Urban Policies’ of the late 1990s and 2000s. Although the degree of variation between urban policies in Europe was high even in that period, many scholars assumed that cities in Europe have something in common in terms of challenges, solutions and instruments as well as institutional changes such as decentralisation and metropolitanization.

In fact, the first volumes of the journal clearly had a focus on urban policies and urban development in Europe. This became apparent in articles such as Ivan Turok’s & Vlad Mykhnenko’s ”Resurgent European cities?” (2008) or Ernesto d’Albergo’s article (2010) on ‘Urban issues in nation-state agendas: a comparison in Western Europe’. A number of the special issues addressed the topic of European Urban policies (Atkinson 2008 on ‘Future of European Cities’) and we also find this topic appearing in the policy section (see the contribution of John Alan Dodd (2011): ‘Localising Europe: putting towns and cities at the core of the future EU’).

In that period, the topic of the resurgence of (post-industrial) cities or the much acclaimed urban renaissance clearly was one of the recurring themes in the journal – before themes such as climate change and smart cities came onto and changed the urban agenda and henceforth had a major impact on the submissions to the journal. However, we would say that urban regeneration and urban change clearly was and still is a major topic of the journal but the way it is theorized and analyzed has taken

different forms. This is reflected in topics such as temporary use, innovative urban policies, or urban policy in cities in the peripheries of Europe (Bragaglia and Caruso 2020; Patti and Polyak 2015; De Gregorio Hurtado 2019; Vinci 2019).

One of the aims of the journal, in accordance with the European Urban Research Association, was to publish specifically on cities in post-socialist Europe. Certainly, there could have been more contributions but special issues and quite a few articles clearly demonstrate that the journal has been able to open a forum for academic contributions to the transformation of post-socialist cities. The special issue edited by Rosenfeld and Kauffmann (2014) on ‘The development of cities and municipalities in Central and Eastern Europe’ included an interesting comparative paper on the governance of urban shrinkage in post-socialist cities (Rink et al. 2014) and a particular highlight was Iwona Sagan’s (2014) paper on the Gdańsk–Gdynia metropolitan area. Papers on cities in non-EU states such as Russia (Alexander S. Puzanov (2008) development challenges facing the cities of the Russian Federation in the European context and Nadir Kinossian (2017) State-led metropolisation in Russia) illustrated the widening European reach of the journal.

The almost exclusive focus on European cities was gradually reduced over the years. Recent volumes have more international contributions to cities and initiatives in the Global South (as demonstrated by the publication of papers from South-East Asia, Africa, Australia and Latin America). This internationalization is also evident in the content and the contributions to the annual EURA conferences.

It is also worth referring to the special issues the journal has regularly published. In addition to the ones already mentioned on the development of cities and municipalities in Central and Eastern Europe we would like to highlight three special issues that in our view contributed to the goals of the journal:

- the special issue on urban problems and issues in contemporary Spanish and Portuguese cities (edited by Nuria Benach and Andrés Walliser, Volume 4, Issue 3, 2011);
- the special issue on North American Urban Politics (edited by Annika M. Hinze and James M. Smith, Volume 6, Issue 3, 2013); and
- the issue on co-housing (edited by Lidewij Tummers, Volume 8, Issue 1, 2015)

The special issues on geographical areas (North America, Iberian Peninsula, CEE countries) were very successful as was the particular focus on co-housing which has seen several other papers on the subject published since then.

Turning now to the *Policy* and *Practice* sections the former is composed of shorter policy papers of 2000–4000 words. The idea behind launching Policy Paper Section of Urban Research and Practice was to bridge important gaps in the communication about urban issues. One of the gaps is between the academic and policy communities – it is well known that long academic papers are rarely read by those who shape policies or take political decisions. Urban Research and Practice aimed to be different from the many other urban journals by giving more chances to interesting papers which are less academic but highly relevant in terms of policy implications.

Moreover, there are large gaps between scholars from different parts of Europe; many of whom are not in an equivalent position regarding the language, communication and

academic skills which are all required to prepare high level academic papers in English. In order to address this, the journal aimed to be different from the many other urban journals by creating a space in which interesting, less academically oriented papers that come from beyond the Anglo-Saxon world and the more ‘developed’ North-Western European countries had a space in which to be published.

Policy Papers focus on significant policy developments at European, national, regional and local levels. More recently, a number of Policy articles from the Global South have been published reflecting the journal’s growing scope and readership. Between 2008 and 2021, during the 13 years of *Urban Research and Practice*, 46 policy papers have been published in the policy section. The aim to have a more dispersed geography has been achieved: while 30% of the papers relate to north-western European countries, the share of east Europeans is 24% and of south Europeans 15% (9% deals with EU, while 22% with outside EU issues).

As noted earlier, one of the gaps is between the academic and policy communities – it is well known that long academic papers are rarely read by those who shape policies or take political decisions. Moreover, there are large gaps between scholars from different parts of Europe; many of whom are not in an equivalent position regarding the language, communication and academic skills which are all required to prepare high level academic papers in English. In order to address this, the journal aimed to be different from the many other urban journals by creating a space in which interesting, less academically oriented papers that come from beyond the Anglo-Saxon world and the more ‘developed’ North-Western European countries had a space in which to be published.

The *Practice and Project report* section published papers up to 2000 words in length that focus on innovative projects, conferences and events being carried out at a local level in cities or regions. The aim of this section is to reflect the rich diversity of practices, planning projects, and new and innovative solutions to urban challenges be it of demographic, economic, environmental, quality of life, or sustainability-related nature. More than 20 such articles have been published covering a wide array of issues and ideas, and it would be impossible to mention all of them here. However, two recurring themes are worth highlighting. One is the coverage of those practices developed to preserve green, natural environments and cultural heritage in an era of continuous urban growth and growing pressure on urban land. The second is the focus on projects and initiatives to improve the quality of life and health of the urban population. As regards the first theme Heide Esswein & Thomas Kiwitt focused on issue 3 of volume 5 on the Stuttgart Region’s Landscape Park concept, which is an instrument for the balanced development of open spaces within a densely populated region (Esswein and Kiwitt 2012). The Landscape Park has become a successful instrument that helps local institutions develop green infrastructure as an important locational factor. Similarly, Claudia Cassatella in ‘The “Corona Verde” Strategic Plan: an integrated vision for protecting and enhancing the natural and cultural heritage’ in volume 6 issue 2 demonstrated how a regional strategic plan links together policies for nature, landscape and cultural heritage, creating a new and alternative vision of the territory, based on the quality of the environment and of life (Cassatella 2013).

The long standing editor Rob Atkinson is stepping down after 13 years (2008–2020) as editor-in-chief. In these long 13 years, Rob has done a remarkable job for the journal, directing a small editorial board of three people with passion and competence, building a deep friendship within the team during the annual meetings in Budapest (that has

become the headquarters for the four of us). His contribution has been immeasurable, the current standing of the journal is the outcome of his commitment and hard work in developing the journal from its infancy. The journal has benefitted hugely from his direction and his knowledge and insights on urban policy and practice during his time as editor. As the number of submissions is steadily increasing, the editorial team has been expanded to consist of an editor and three associate editors, with Cristina Stănuș being a new member.

To mark the changes taking place in the Editorial team and to celebrate Rob Atkinson's stewardship of the title, we have put together a Virtual Special Issue highlighting a limited selection of papers that we as editors consider as highly relevant to urban debate and practice. The Virtual Special Issue includes seven academic articles, one policy paper and one practice paper. We did not select the papers downloaded or cited most often but wanted to present the diverse range of papers that met the ethos of EURA and the goals of the journal and contributed most to its development.

The selection of papers has been difficult due to the quality of the many contributions published, but we hope that the virtual issue will give those who access it a flavour of what the journal has published since its inception, how it has evolved, and the inspiring potential that it has ahead in this *Urban Age*.

The collection of papers is accessible as a Virtual Special Issue on the website of the journal <https://www.tandfonline.com/rurp> for the duration of 2021. We hope you will enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed revisiting past issues and selecting the papers.

## Disclosure statement

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