

## How international is *Urban Morphology*?

*Urban Morphology* was set up explicitly as an international journal. In many respects it is a child of its time, much as a century ago the journals of various national academic and professional societies were children of their time. 'International' is a designation to which even journals of a nationalistic pedigree now aspire. And not only journals but universities and their departments and individual researchers find themselves competing in national pecking orders according to perceived international standing. But there is commonly a poor fit between rhetoric and reality. In my own academic discipline, geography, a number of writers, notably Gutiérrez and López-Nieva (2001), have drawn attention to the flimsy basis for the international standing of the overwhelming majority of journals. Most are at best international only within the English-speaking world (Short *et al.*, 2001) and in many cases the majority of the authors of articles are based in the country of the journal's publication.

What emerges from these analyses is an anglophone squint. This chronic condition, frequently unrecognized but palpably worsening over the course of the post-war era, has been exacerbated by the meagre coverage of non-anglophone journals in the databases of the Institute for Scientific Information. The analysis of nineteen human geography journals by Gutiérrez and López-Nieva (2001) revealed that in every case less than one-quarter of the authors were based in non-anglophone countries. Indeed only 4 per cent of authors in the leading general geography journal published in the USA (*Annals of the Association of American Geographers*) were based in non-anglophone countries, the comparable figure for the leading general geography journal in the UK (*Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*) being 6 per cent. Arguably the closest in its subject matter to *Urban Morphology* among the journals scrutinized was *Urban Geography*. This is a journal independent of any national society but with an American publisher. Its proportion of authors with institutional affiliations in non-anglophone countries was somewhat higher, but still only 9 per cent (see also Wheeler, 2001).

How does *Urban Morphology* measure up by such indicators of internationality? Although these are early days - *Urban Morphology* has only just entered its seventh year of publication - its authors have so far been based in a variety of countries spread over 4 continents. Over one-half (58 per cent) of the authors of articles during the first 6 years of publication, 1997-2002, were affiliated to institutions in non-anglophone countries, somewhat higher than the corresponding proportion of authors of 'viewpoints' (42 per cent). If book reviews are considered according to where the book was published, 45 per cent had their principal place of publication in a non-anglophone country.

However, this provides a limited view of internationality. An alternative is to focus not on the authors but on the language of the publications they cite in their articles. Looked at in this way, non-anglophone languages were in a clear majority (61 per cent of the publications cited), with Italian accounting for 22 per cent, followed by French (18 per cent), German (11 per cent) and Spanish (7 per cent). While this may help allay any concerns about an anglophone squint in *Urban Morphology*, it provides fuel for another concern: why is there so little reference to publications in non-European languages? Part of the explanation is to be found in the very small proportion of contributors whose native language is non-European. However, this prompts further questions, of which one is particularly pertinent here. To what extent is the proportion of cited publications in various languages accounted for by authors citing publications in their own language? Might *Urban Morphology* be more appropriately described as multinational than international, authors sharing the same journal but cocooned within the literature in their own language, international communication being confined to that between countries sharing the same language?

The evidence on this matter, in so far as there is sufficient to carry much weight, is on the whole reassuring, though far from suggesting unimpeded communication between languages. The importance of linguistic boundaries is evidenced by the fact that the large majority of citations (73 per cent) were to publications in the native language of the citing author. However, comparable figures for authors grouped by native language reveal considerable variation, ranging from 96 per cent for Italian, through 85 per cent for English and 78 per cent for German, to 69 per cent for French. Not surprisingly, in the case of authors whose native languages were spoken by relatively small numbers of urban morphologists the percentages tended to be lower. There was also great variation between authors, ranging from those who cited no publications in their native language (although these are authors who have migrated to an English-speaking country and have effectively adopted English as their principal language) to those (17 per cent) who cited publications only in their native language. One remarkable author cited publications in no less than six languages and two others cited publications in five languages. However, the overall picture is one in which authors refer predominantly, but not overwhelmingly, to the literature in their own language.

Part of this propensity for authors to cite publications in their own language reflects the tendency in urban morphology, as in many other fields, for authors to deal with subject matter relating to their own country. The critical question is whether issues, methods, and especially concepts, of wide significance are being communicated across international and linguistic boundaries. In particular, are concepts and methods that have general, or at least broad, application being used to shed light on the particular cases on which many of the papers in *Urban Morphology* focus? While the answer to this question is far from simple, and not readily expressed in quantitative terms, there is evidence that ideas of wide significance are being transmitted more effectively internationally than they were a decade ago. Articles in *Urban Morphology* are playing a part in this. The extent to which they do this in the future should be the main criterion by which the journal's success as an international journal is judged.

#### References

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*J.W.R. Whitehand*