

Editorial comment

Quality, consistency and coverage

Taking on the editorial role of this journal is a daunting task. High standards have been set, achieved, and maintained over an extended period: 22 years and 41 issues. While this is only a small output in comparison to some major journals, now publishing a dozen or more papers each month, this remains challenging for ISUF's small scale of operations and resources.

The flow of manuscripts remains good. However quality is very variable, and it is clear that some papers submitted to *Urban Morphology* have been submitted elsewhere, probably rejected, and have not been reworked for our specialist focus nor house style. Some are clearly written by PhD students (with or without evident input from supervisors), and indeed PhD procedures in some academic traditions require evidence of international refereed journal publication before a PhD is awarded. While such papers may give us access to the latest research, their quality is extremely variable.

Two factors affect how papers are received by the editorial team. One is their focus. If they pay no heed to the range of intellectual debates characterizing the pages of this journal, it is usually difficult to see how they consider themselves to be urban morphological scholarship. While we wish to broaden our intellectual horizons, we need to remain a specialist-focus journal and not a generalist 'urban studies' journal. Papers that seek to extend our reach, but from a secure grounding in previous morphological research, are welcome; those that simply ignore it are difficult to place.

The second factor is quality of communication and, inevitably, this involves use of 'academic English', almost a separate language. A poorly-structured paper whose ideas are poorly expressed will not go further; whereas if there is evidence of quality and originality of thinking, the editorial team has often spent large amounts of time and effort in seeking and supporting improvements to make the paper publishable. Yet this labour is itself problematic, as there is a clear danger that changing the words may change the sense, and changing the language may change the 'voice' of an author, perhaps to the detriment of the paper.

These factors alone explain a relatively high rejection rate of submissions to *Urban Morphology*. Yet this also explains our continuing quality and consistency.

Nevertheless overall the journal continues to publish a majority of contributions from authors whose first language is not English, without compromising quality. This is a vital part of our achievement as, of course, the subject of our study is genuinely international. But some gaps in our coverage remain. Papers on particular countries and areas are under-represented – some, indeed, are unrepresented. We would welcome contributions from such locations, and dialogue with potential authors who wish to bring high-quality research to an English-language readership and to this journal in particular.

We would also welcome contributions which seek to push the boundaries of urban morphological study, or to make stronger connections between urban form and other aspects such as perception, transportation and mobility, energy use (and other sustainability issues), climate change and resilience, and so on. Previous submissions in such areas have not engaged with the urban form elements of the problem to any substantive degree, and so would unacceptably dilute our specialist focus.

In maintaining the quality, consistency and coverage of *Urban Morphology* I am deeply grateful to the initial impetus and sustained input of Jeremy Whitehand, supported in recent years by Susan Whitehand, and for their continuing advice and support. The Editorial Board is also an invaluable, and frequently-consulted, resource; but its numbers are relatively low and we will be seeking additional members, particularly from under-represented areas and disciplines. Finally I wish to thank the reviewers of individual papers, who have provided insightful comments on a wide range of submissions, often within a very short period. I look forward to working with you all.

Peter J. Larkham