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Nadin, Vincent

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Vincent Nadin

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Next steps for Planning Practice and Research

A rapidly changing context

Imagine sending multiple hard copies of your paper through the post for review at *Planning Practice and Research* (PPR). The idea seems ridiculous in 2023, but it was standard practice when the first issues were published in the 1980s. There was a step change with the advent of email communication in the late 1990s and another in the early 2010s when PPR joined the Editorial Manager online submission system. Further radical changes in the production process are now underway that will provide more opportunities for authors to publish in PPR and to promote papers to a wider audience.

The world of academic publishing is changing dramatically with rapid advances in publishing technology through digitalisation and Web-based publication. Digitalisation has enabled open access publication under the banner of ‘open science’, a movement that has risen with remarkable speed. It emerged from the United States and Europe on the grounds that social progress and advances in health and welfare are held back by constraints on sharing research knowledge. It was driven forward by the *Budapest Open Access Initiative* convened by the Open Society Institute.¹ Having since been endorsed by EU, UN and many others, it has become the ‘new normal’ of academic publishing. Funding bodies have completely accepted the move to open science and a coalition of predominantly European funders have launched the *Plan S* initiative to require all publications arising from their funding to be made freely available in open access journals or repositories. In only 20 years, the idea of open access has become the orthodoxy almost beyond challenge.

Much is expected of open access, not least the prophecy by the Expert Group to the European Commission on Scholarly Publication that it will remove barriers ‘unleashing the full capacity and efficiency of the emerging world brain’ (2019, p. 25).² Rhetoric aside, it will be very challenging to deliver on such ambitions. Despite wide acceptance of open access, disparities in access to knowledge remain, not least in poorer countries. We should also bear in mind that the corporate sector accounts for about two-thirds of research (OECD, 2021), which is not ‘expected to be held to the same standards’ (Mirowski, 2018, p. 178). Some of the early protagonists of open access will have had visions of a ‘bottom-up open access’ emerging free of ties to big business and more akin to *Academica.edu* (May, 2020, p. 127). In the event, the big publishers who dominate the journal market have unsurprisingly turned around their business model to accommodate open access to maintain the large flows of public funding and free inputs of authors and reviewers into very high profit margins (Puehringer *et al.*, 2021).

The practical outcome for academic journals is that the costs of publication are shifting from the reader paying subscriptions to get access to the content, to the author paying an article publication charge (APC) to allow completely free access to their work. In turn, academic institutions and consortia are redirecting funding from journal

subscriptions to open access publishing agreements with Taylor and Francis and others, to allow their staff to publish at no or discounted cost. The new deals are known as ‘transformative agreements’, the expectation being that in time there will be a full transition to open access publishing. Advocates of full open access of public research have had to accept that at least initially a hybrid model is inevitable, with open access running alongside traditional subscription services. Thus, we are in a transition period, with most journals publishing articles with upfront APCs alongside others with no charge in the traditional subscription style. This is a difficult transition because institutions will be unwilling to pay for open access agreements whilst continuing to pay subscriptions at the same rate. Many institutions are unable to afford to make agreements for open access with the publishers, and many authors will continue to rely on making submissions without a charge.

More content in PPR

Planning research and journals are minnows in this fast-developing story but are no less affected. In responding to the changing context, Taylor and Francis has made fundamental changes in the way it manages the volume of content in PPR and journals like it. Previously, we selected content for each issue according to a maximum number of pages policy. From 2023 we will select content following a minimum number of articles policy. The result is that there will be more articles in each issue of PPR, subject to meeting conditions concerning the proportions of open access versus subscription articles. This will allow PPR to reduce the waiting time for publication in a hard copy issue and the number of articles in the backlog or recently published list. Also, we will no longer be limited by the target of seven or eight articles in special theme issues. We can be flexible and publish a larger number if they pass the quality threshold. We will continue to publish articles online within a few weeks of the paper being accepted.

I should emphasise that PPR will remain a hybrid journal for the foreseeable future, enabling all authors to publish articles without an APC. Institutional subscriptions are needed to gain access to these articles. However, about a third of papers published in PPR in 2021 are open access, and I expect that proportion to increase in 2023 as more authors take advantage of agreements made between institutions and Taylor and Francis. Authors should check the availability of agreements for their institution on the Taylor and Francis website after the paper has been accepted, and before submitting the publishing agreement.³ Research funding bodies and some institutions also provide funds directly to researchers to support open access publishing.

Authors who are not able to pay to publish open access can make use of the option to make the original manuscript (before review) available to read through social media or on a preprint server. Also, the accepted version of a PPR paper can be published on social media or in a repository subject to an 18-month embargo period. All authors also receive 50 free prints of the final typeset ‘version of record’ of papers for circulation.⁴

The assessment criteria for submitted papers will not change. PPR will continue to operate a double anonymous peer review for original research papers. Other article types, including the practice forum pieces, will be reviewed by the editors and board with anonymous review by independent reviewers where we think necessary. I will elaborate on the assessment criteria in a future editorial and explain how authors can best present

their work to reviewers. For now, I should mention that too many papers do not pass the initial review and are rejected for obvious failings without sending to reviewers. We welcome those papers that are presented in the accessible, succinct and analytical style that we seek, whilst avoiding the pretentious and convoluted language that is not uncommon in planning journals. Over coming years, we will be monitoring changing publication policies, especially with a view to a more open review process. In some disciplines paper reviews and the author's response are made available alongside the published paper, subject to agreement of those involved. This is not something we want to jump into, but we see the benefits of encouraging more dialogue between authors, reviewers and readers.

Connecting practice and research

In the first edition of PPR, Ron Griffiths, the then editor of PPR, emphasised that the journal will 'provide a much-needed forum to strengthen the links between planning practitioners and researchers, whether in academic institutions, consultancies or local government research sections' (Griffiths, 1986, p. 3). Whilst in the early years there was success in meeting this objective, it has not been a strong feature of the journal for some time. I am reviving that objective now with a concerted effort to raise awareness of PPR content in practice, and a renewed call to planning practitioners to get involved in the journal through authorship in the practice forum section, and by commenting on other papers. We must not underestimate the continuing challenge of engagement between practice and research, but PPR should contribute more. I am especially interested in the value and potential impact of the research we publish for policy and practice. PPR should reflect the trend to broaden ways of evaluating the impact of academic research beyond the dominant models of impact factors and citations (Expert Group to the European Commission on Scholarly Publication, 2019). I welcome feedback on the influence of researchers' work in practice and the contribution that professional practice is making or can make to research agendas.

Most of the articles published in PPR are of direct interest to professionals and civil society organisations involved in planning practice. I will ensure that this continues and seek more commentary on academic work from practice. There is a healthy demand for publication in PPR and a high number of article downloads. We are examining the reach of the journal into practice communities and doing more to raise awareness of content among selected groups. We will be raising the visibility of PPR content through targeted social media promotion and looking to the editorial board and authors to assist, including producing short video abstracts of their work. Special theme issues offer potential here and have proved popular in the past. Topics lined up for coming editions include the historic built environment, regional design, social justice, changing values in planning, policy transfer and the circular economy, with more in the pipeline. I am keen to consider proposals for special theme issues, and PPR may be able to sponsor workshops and conferences that lead to theme issues for the journal

PPR has a truly international flavour, although only half the 55 nationalities of authors who submitted papers during 2021–22 made it through to publication. I hope to see more papers published from places that figure less often in planning journals, and I will

encourage editorial board members to assist potential authors whose papers show promise.⁵

Editorial board

Members of the editorial board have given invaluable help with the journal over recent years, as have the hundreds of reviewers who give their time freely to comment on submissions, 150 in 2022 alone. During the last year, I made some major changes to the editorial board and longstanding members have now retired from the board. Special thanks go to Joe Doak who was editor of the journal before me, and to Robert Shipley and Dave Hedgcock who were former associate editors in North America and Australasia. Also grateful thanks to others who have retired over recent years: Paul Butler, Brendan Gleeson, Barrie Needham, Peter Newman, Stephen Owen, Dick Schuiling, Marco Venturi, Anthony Yeh and Tang Zilai. Vanessa Watson who gave the journal a welcome perspective from the Global South and helped me personally with papers from Africa, sadly died in September 2021.⁶

In 2022, Stefanie Dühr took on the role of associate editor for Australasia, and Giancarlo Cotella became our new associate editor Europe. A full list of editorial board members is given on the PPR website. I will be making further appointments to the board during 2023 to fill gaps in specific subject areas and global regions that are not yet well represented. Expressions of interest are welcome. Thanks also go to the team at Routledge for supporting the development of PPR: Meloney Bartlett and Jonathan Manley; the production team, Vhernajeal Macapugas and Rekha Gopinath; and the management team: Alex Wandl, Kasia Piskorek, Azadeh Mashayekhi, Jakub Piskorek, Katharina Borgmann and Matt Roberts.

Notes

1. The Budapest Open Access Agreement 2002 and updates are available to read at: <https://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org>.
2. The 'world brain' was an idea promoted by H. G. Wells in essays and lectures collected together in the book *World Brain* originally published in 1937 and reprinted by MIT Press in 2021.
3. Taylor and Francis give advice about open access publishing and the availability of institutional agreements at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/openaccess>.
4. See the Taylor and Francis guide on sharing your article at: <https://authorservices.taylorandfrancis.com/research-impact/sharing-versions-of-journal-articles/>.
5. For the current list of calls for special theme issues of PPR see: <https://www.tandfonline.com/action/newsAndOffers?journalCode=cpr20>.
6. A short obituary of Vanessa Watson by Bruce Stiffler and Susan Parnell is available at: <https://aesop-planning.eu/resources/news-archive/aesop/vanessa-watson-2>.

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Vincent Nadin

Department of Urbanism, Delft University of Technology, Delft, Netherlands

 v.nadin@tudelft.nl  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9600-9197>