



URBAN STUDIES JOURNAL

Preparing the Case for a Special Issue

Background and Basics

Special Issues of *Urban Studies* are an integral element of the journal. Widely appreciated by readers, the editors are committed to their continued publication. At present normally 3 or 4 Special Issues appear each year covering a wide range of topics. Published as an issue of the journal, their publication raises two major challenges (which help distinguish the Special Issue from the edited book). First is the need to ensure that the quality of the published articles is at least equal to that of articles published in ordinary issues of the journal; second, given that the journal is published monthly and that each Special Issue will have been allocated to a particular month in advance, Guest Editors and contributors need to be fully aware of the strict publishing deadlines imposed by the production schedule. *Urban Studies* has in place procedures that ensure quality control (the test of which is that Special Issue articles are regularly among the more highly cited manuscripts published in the journal).

Initial Steps

Many Special Issues come about as a result of convenors of conferences or similar sessions wishing to establish whether, in principle, the Editors may be interested in publishing a collection of the papers. Initial contact along these lines is welcome though any support given at this stage can *only* be in principle. Potential guest editors need to be aware that conference papers, unlike their published counterpart, are much more variable in their quality, and therefore, need to be realistic in what is being proposed. At this stage it is as well to bear in mind that a Special Issue is normally about 90k words in length. (If papers average 8k words inclusive, and bearing in mind the need for an Introduction, possible comment papers and factoring in a 'slippage factor' (rejections arising from the refereeing process etc), proposers should have an idea of the number of papers required and whether at this early stage a proposal for a Special Issue is feasible.) The editors encourage discussion of a proposal at this stage.

Making the Case

Decisions on Special Issue proposals are made collectively by the editors. Special Issue proposals should be no more than 5,000 words in length. Potential Guest Editors need to submit a document that:

- (1) outlines the rationale for the Special Issue, the importance in publishing a collection of papers on this particular topic (up to 750 words);
- (2) provides a list of the paper titles *and* abstracts for each of these (maximum of 250 words per abstract). This list should include names of the potential authors and their affiliation and, where possible, a link to the authors' institutional webpages;
- (3) provides an outline of the possible/desired timetable for initial submission of the articles (ready, that is, for sending to referees).

The Role of the Guest Editor(s)

Proposers of Special Issues should note that as potential Guest Editors they will play an important part in ensuring the quality of the Issue and thus of the articles comprising it.

Firstly, Guest Editors should ensure that the papers submitted to the journal are of the highest quality, such that they are likely to come through the refereeing process successfully. Where there are 10 or so papers it is possible that some may experience difficulty in the refereeing process including the possibility that they are rejected. But, clearly, the loss of too many papers will undermine the viability of the SI. Thus, *it is imperative* that the Guest Editor(s) should ensure as far as is possible that papers are robust. Papers delivered at a conference which provided the rationale for the SI proposal are less likely to come through refereeing unless they are fully revised before submission to the journal. Guest Editors themselves should referee each paper before it is submitted to the journal.

Second, the Journal expects Guest Editors to be closely involved in the editorial review and decision-making process following paper submission. Once all the referee reports on a SI paper have been received, the Guest Editor will consider the comments of the reviewers, communicating their recommendation (accept, major revision, revise/resubmit, etc.) to the Journal Editor - providing the basis for a dialogue. In some cases, the Guest Editors and/or Journal Editor may be required to provide an additional set of comments for authors (though in the case of these reports it is accepted they are not penned on the basis of anonymity as for the 'normal' referees).

A third role of the Guest Editor is to ensure that the individual papers contribute to an Issue that has overall coherence. Key here will be in ensuring that each of the papers clearly relates to the overall ambitions and purpose of the SI. The Introductory paper by the Guest Editors is pivotal here, providing the conceptual framework, for example, in which paper authors can position themselves. This framework might also suggest how the papers can be sectionalised within the SI. Obviously, there are other ways to aim at coherence. For example, Guest Editors might consider the inclusion of one or two papers (shorter than the average paper, perhaps 3k) at the end of the SI, penned by star researchers in the field offering reflections on the topic of the SI and its airing through the papers comprising it. What needs to be avoided is that the papers read as separate case studies in which the connections to the 'bigger issues' raised in the SI are left to the reader to identify.

A fourth role of the Guest Editor is that they are expected to be vigilant at ensuring that the papers are progressed efficiently so that the final expected deadline for the submission of all the copy is met. This will involve being proactive in ensuring progression of the papers and, overall, of the SI.

Decision-Making Procedures for Special Issues

As you will be aware, we receive a considerable number of proposals for Special Issues often exceeding the space available. Special Issue proposals are considered by a sub-panel of editors, organised by the Special Issues editor and the Editor-in Chief. Proposals can be submitted at any time. A check is initially made by the Special Issue editor and Editor-in-Chief that the proposal as submitted is in principle ready for being considered by the sub-panel of editors. Readiness here is defined in terms of the proposal being fully presented (rationale, abstracts, etc), that it represents a sufficiently novel and important topic for an SI which has not been the subject of a recently published SI and other basic criteria. Proposals not meeting these requirements may be returned to Guest Editors for revision, or they may be rejected. Once the decision has been taken to circulate the proposal to the sub-panel, we aim to respond to proposers with a final decision within six weeks.

The strength of the rationale and coherence of the proposal as a whole, particularly in terms of the extent to which individual papers address the broader themes of the SI, are key criteria used by the editors to make decisions. All papers should make an original contribution to urban studies beyond their empirical subject-matter; we are not interested in descriptive local case studies. We value a wide geographical range of contributions in the sense of proposals incorporating papers that examine how the SI themes are played out in a range of countries and regions. A broad geographical range of authors is also welcome. We take the track record of SI guest editors and paper authors into account.

All proposals should be emailed to the journal administrator responsible for Special Issues, Ruth Harkin, ruth.harkin@glasgow.ac.uk.

Should you wish to submit a draft proposal, Andy Cumbers (andrew.cumbers@glasgow.ac.uk) is willing to provide feedback on it.