# Northumbria Research Link

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# Polyphonic narratives for built environment research

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## Abstract

### Purpose
The purpose of this article is to construct series of narratives by assessing a selection of the key literature generated by Open House International over a period of fifteen years. The article also presents a brief review of the latest developments of the journal while introducing concise observations on the articles published in this edition - Volume 45, Issues 1&2.

### Design/methodology/approach
Through a classification procedure of selected special issues published by Open House International since 2006, ten issues were identified based on the currency of the issues they generated. Following the review of the editorials, the key content of more than 100 articles within these special issues, the content of this edition, and relevant seminal literature, the analysis engages, through critical reflection, with various themes that echo the polyphonic nature of built environment research.

### Findings
The analysis conveys the plurality and diversity in built environment research where generic types of narratives are established to include three categories: leitmotif, contextual/conceptual, and open-ended narratives. Each of which includes sub narrative classifications. The leitmotif narrative includes design studio pedagogy, sustainable environments for tourism, responsive learning environments, affordable housing environments, diversity in urban environments, and urbanism in globalised environments. The contextual/conceptual narrative encompasses architecture and urbanism in the global south and the tripartite urban performance and transformation. The open-ended narrative embraces thematic reflections on the contributions of this edition of Open House International.

### Originality/value
Constructing polyphonic narratives in built environment research based on contemporary knowledge is original in the sense of capturing the crux of the themes within these narratives and articulating this in a pithy form. The elocution of the narratives stimulates a sustained quest for re-thinking concepts, notions, and issues of concerns while invigorating research prospects and setting the future direction of Open House International.

### Keywords
Architecture, Built environment, Research, Sustainable development, Urbanism

## 1. Introduction

Vol. 45 No. 1 and 2, March 2019 is the first edition of Open House International (OHI) to be published by Emerald Publishing, one of the important global publishers in various areas and disciplines including pertinent fields in built environment, housing, and sustainable development.

OHI was founded by Nicholas Wilkinson while working in the Netherlands at the Foundation of Architects Research, (SAR) *Stichting Architecten Research*. In 1976 the journal started as a bulletin for knowledge dissemination of the practical application of '*supports and detachable units*', on the basis of the idea of N.J. Habraken, the founder of the Open Building theory and SAR. OHI grew significantly in its first twenty years to become a standard journal on Open Building and Built Environment and published quarterly. Over the past two decades, the journal has witnessed another significant growth and expanded its scope to include various disciplines within the built environment. For more than 40 years, Nicholas Wilkinson continued his message and led the Journal until sadly passing away in 2017. The authors of this article have been part of OHI for many years and are now the Co-Editors-in-Chief.  In addition to its inclusion in various databases such as the Web of Science/Clarivate Analytics and Scopus, OHI has been awarded the distinction of CIB Encouraged Journal by the International Council for Research and Innovation in Building and Construction (CIB) since the early 2000s.

While the OHI has a history of more than four decades with strong ties with various associations and academic institutions in Australia, North America, Europe, South East Asia and the Middle East, being part of Emerald will empower the widening and broadening of these existing relationships so that OHI remains a key stream for those memberships while meeting its promise for global coverage and presence. Speaking of the acquisition of Open House International, Tony Roche, Publishing and Strategic Relations Director at Emerald, said, "*We are delighted to welcome Open House International into our portfolio. The journal has a long-standing and excellent reputation amongst the architecture and planning communities, with contributions extending across architecture, design, urban studies and housing. The interdisciplinary nature of the topics fit perfectly with our ambition to provide rigorous content with real world application*"(Emerald News, 2020).

Particularly, the resources and the established publishing and editorial teams that Emerald enjoys will strengthen the overall quality of the journal, its reach, and authorship readership base. A significant outcome of the inclusion in Emerald's portfolio of "Property Management and Built Environment" journals is the updating of its editorial and review boards and the introduction of new members of brilliant minds from around the globe. Notably, the introduction of distinguished colleagues whose research and publications are at the international forefront of built environment research, in addition to collaboration other Emerald's journals, would enable more prominence as well as coverage of themes and topics that are prudent to contexts in the global north and the global south.

While this article commemorates the first edition of OHI under the flagship of Emerald, it aims to establish a discourse that depicts selected earlier contributions while articulating the future direction the Journal. The article constructs series of thematic narratives by reconsidering selected texts generated by OHI over the past fifteen years. It presents a brief review of the latest developments of the journal while

introducing brief outlines of the articles published in Volume 45, Issues 1&2. A broad concluding outlook drawn from the narratives is developed while echoing the diversity and plurality of built environment research.

## 2. The notion of polyphony as an approach to classification and analysis

The diverse nature of contemporary built environment related knowledge, and its epistemological foundations, is now palpable in most discourses generated by research of all types, scholarly-conceptual and exploratory-empirical. Discussing and debating various themes is a step towards further articulation that enables expansion and enhanced focus of these themes. Through a classification procedure of selected special issues published by OHI between 2006 and 2019, 10 issues were identified. Based on reviewing the editorials and the key contents of more than 100 articles within these special issues as well as the content of this edition, the analysis engages through critical reflection with various themes that resonate the pluralistic nature of built environment research.
            Utilising polyphony as a metaphor for discussion seems to be relevant. As a term from the discipline of music, it represents a type of melodious texture consisting of two or more simultaneous voices of independent melody, as opposed to a musical texture with just one voice, monophony; one prevailing melodic voice (Albright, 2004). The narratives are described as representing a polyphonic condition since they involve various approaches, ideological positions, methodological tools, and critical elucidations. In some cases, positions, approaches, and tools drift into dual interpretations. Yet, in other cases they converge in harmony to form a holistic discourse.  However, within the polyphonic condition, there are sub classifications. Conceptually and for grouping purposes the narratives are clustered under three categories:

- The first category is leitmotif narratives, which represents specific recurrent themes that keep presenting themselves on the map of built environment research. This category is discussed through six special issues (2006-2016) that address specific themes.
- The second category is conceptual/contextual narratives, which represents specific concepts or notions that are debated individually or linked with other theories. This category is argued through four special issues (2016-2019) that address specific theories, fields of inquiry, and contexts.
- The third category is the open-ended narrative, which represents concepts, issues, and themes generated within the articles published in this edition of Open House International (Vol. 45, No. 1&2).

## 3. Leitmotif narratives (2006-2016)

Leitmotif narratives are captured through brief analyses of important and recurrent themes within built environment research, which were initially instigated in six special issues (2006-2016) that address: a) design studio pedagogy, b) sustainable

environments for tourism, c) responsive learning environments, d) affordable housing environments, e) diversity in urban environments, and f) urbanism in globalised environments (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Open House International – covers of special issues identified to capture the leitmotif narrative (Courtesy of Emerald Publishing).

### a) The narrative of design studio pedagogy
The process of educating future professionals varies dramatically across different contexts and schools, but with one striking similarity – the dominance of the design studio as the main forum for knowledge acquisition and assimilation, and for creative exploration and interaction. Such a setting encompasses intensive cognitive activities; it is where students explore their creative skills that are so prised by the profession; it is the kiln where future architects are moulded. It has occupied a central position since architectural education was formalised more than two centuries ago in France and later in Germany, the rest of Europe, North America, and the rest of the world (Salama, 2015).

The special issue of Open House International – vol. 31-3 entitled *Design Studio Teaching Practices: Between Traditional, Revolutionary, and Virtual Models*, generates a

narrative which argues that there is a tremendous diversity of contents, approaches, methods adopted in the studio. However, experiential learning appears to be a common key issue across the board with different interpretations within the narrative. This goes along the line of thought of several eminent education theorists including Benjamin Bloom; David Kolb; Jean Piaget; and John Dewey who voiced the opinion that experience should be an integral component of any teaching/learning process.  In design pedagogy, educators have capitalised on these theories and engaged with a spectrum of techniques that incorporate experiential learning components in studio pedagogy (Sanoff, 1984, 2000; Teymur, 1996).

Developed by scholars from several countries, the debate engenders important insights about design pedagogy as it asserts that the mission of a school of architecture or a design program should foster an environment that nurtures exploration and critical thinking. Today, inquiry and investigation are viewed as activities central to studio pedagogy where the integration of research into teaching is indispensable. Particularly, the narrative of design pedagogy ensues at a time when the level of concern—about how architectural education can meet the demands placed on the profession by society—was intensive and the stream of ideas and concerns was crested at an alarmingly high level. Most important was the focus; an emphasis on issues central to our own mission as design educators that simply involves the development of design skills and critical thinking abilities through active learning. Thus, the narrative presents new opportunities to strengthen the studio-learning environment, to enhance the role of pedagogues in shaping design education, and to improve the quality of that education. Such a narrative was the base for a book that engages with studio pedagogy in its fullest sense: *Design Studio Pedagogy: Horizons for the Future* (Salama & Wilkinson, 2007), which represents further development of many of the ideas raised in the special issue.

### b) *The narrative of sustainable environments for tourism*
Ecotourism, said to be first coined as a term by Hector Ceballos Lascurain, promotes environmental responsibility and ensures that visitors take nothing but photographs, and leave nothing but footprints (Ceballos Lascurain, 1996).  The narrative that addresses the relationship between ecotourism and sustainable development can be found in the many elucidations of ecotourism and the associated cases discussed in the special issue of Open House International – vol. 32-4 entitled *Ecotourism and Ecolodges: Sustainable Planning and Design for Environmentally Friendly Tourism Facilities*. Following reports of international organisations (WTTC, 1992; WTO, 1996;), the narrative avows that ecotourism is a sub component of sustainable development and that it should be regarded as a key player in the understanding of human history and its interaction with natural environments.

The generic concept of environmentally sustainable tourism has emerged in parallel to the realisation of the potential benefits in combining people interest in nature with their concern for the environment.  It is a responsible way of travel that appeals to people who love nature and indigenous cultures allowing them to enjoy an attraction or a locality and ensures that local cultures and environments are unaffected negatively. As the sustainable tourism industry expands worldwide, ecologically sensitive facilities continue to be in high demand that can be met with ecolodges: small-scale facilities that provide tourists with the opportunity of being in close contact with nature and local culture.  The narrative attempts to answer the question: *How much*

*change in or alternations of natural and cultural environments will be acceptable?* It explores sustainable planning and design for tourism by debating, analysing, and visioning a wide spectrum of issues, with a focus on the developments taking place in biologically sensitive areas, whether desert, forest, tropical coasts, or rural environments. Covering the planet earth from Australia through the Arab World and Turkey to Argentina and Chile, the shared denominator within the contributions is that emphasis is placed upon integrating people, nature, and local economy into responsive development processes.

The narrative acknowledges that sustainable tourism or eco-tourism is not an option but a necessity, especially in contexts that enjoy unique richness in natural and cultural resources. A true ecotourism and ecolodge culture has to spread amongst different decision making sectors so that all key players (local authorities, NGOs, private sector, professionals, local communities) are properly involved, and are benefited from the process. It should be emphasised though that the creation of guidance documents does not mean the end of the process. Guidelines do not provide blue prints on how sustainable tourism can be implemented or how environmentally friendly facilities can be realised. Awareness and training programs are needed in the field of sustainable development for tourism purposes. This would enable the development of positive attitudes of all parties involved toward the responsibility to the environment.

### c) The narrative of responsive learning Environments

The educational process involves mental and cognitive activities that include knowledge acquisition and assimilation, testing students' motivation and academic performance, and faculty and teachers' productivity. Applicable to school buildings and university campuses, the way in which the planning and design is approached and the way we perceive learning environments make powerful statements about how we view education. How educational buildings are designed tells us much about how teaching and learning activities take place. While it was said several decades ago that a good teacher could teach anywhere, a growing body of knowledge suggests a direct correlation between the physical aspects of the learning environment, teaching processes, and learning outcomes. In its commitment to introduce timely and pressing issues on built environment research, the special issue of Open House International – vol. 34-1, entitled *Shaping the Future of Learning Environments: Emerging Paradigms and Best Practices;* discourses on sustainable learning environments are presented.  A worldwide commitment to designing responsive environments conducive to learning is witnessed in many academic and professional settings (Sanoff, 2001, 2002; Knapp, Noschis, & Pasalar, 2007).

The narrative manifests the trans-disciplinary paradigm where knowledge about learning environments crosses the boundaries of disciplines including pedagogy, psychology, behavioural sciences, planning, and design. Remarkably, reference to the work of scientists and education theorists is palpable in the work presented (Dewey, 1916; Friere, 1971; Gardner, 1983; Edwards & Usher, 2001; Kolb and Kolb 2005; Stevenson, 2008). The narrative unveils qualities and characteristics of learning environments at different scales and in different contexts, from classroom typologies to campus outdoor spaces. Placing emphasis on emerging archetypes in learning environments the narrative scrutinises issues that pertain to the academic house clustering, the school as heart of the community, the rising interest in new classroom

spaces and forms, the user-centred processes, utilising the learning environment as an open textbook, and the impact of recent advances in information technologies and globalisation on the future of learning.

Shared among most contributions to this narrative are two important facets, collaboration in planning and design decision making and a continuous focus on the users of the learning environment whether in design, evaluation, or the actual occupancy.  While exhibiting different types of commitment to the creation of responsive learning environments amenable to creativity and innovation, the narrative advances the discussion on the characteristics and parameters of the future of learning environments while at the same time paves the road to continuously questioning norms and practices that ultimately foster the creation of environments conducive to learning.

### d) The narrative of affordable housing environments

The question of affordable housing environments has attracted scholars to explore planning and design determinants, financing mechanisms, cultural and social issues, and construction and building techniques. This interest has been the case for several decades since affordable housing themes have offered a rich research area that involves many paradoxes that keep presenting challenges for planners, architects, economists, and decision makers.  Housing costs are increasing in most cities and incomes are not increasing at the same rate. Undoubtedly, the issue of housing affordability is widespread worldwide. Governments have responded to this issue through ways of cost reductions in order to make homes available at a price that a user is able to pay. However, this area of concern has been a permanent preoccupation of housing technocrats consumed in the quality and location of the housing unit, often overlooking other associated socio-cultural and psychological dimensions (Lawrence, 1995; Sengupta, 2006; Carswell, 2012). The academic community is no exception; it has responded to the issue of housing affordability by conducting research that places emphasis on the physical aspects of dwellings, while oversimplifying other critical demands placed on affordable housing provision by societal and environmental needs.

Housing quality is a composite good with a variety of attributes, including: structural condition, standard of services, amenities, location, usable space, and occupancy standards. It can, at the same time, be laden with physical, economic and cultural dimensions. Houses are not only art forms or machines to live in but also goods with immense socio-economic value. Consciously or unconsciously people use the externally defined meanings of 'housing' to situate themselves with others who share their values and lifestyles in asserting their social status and identity. Understanding how these issues of affordability may relate to people's preferences mandates an understanding of housing quality and lifestyle theories. This was the central theme of narrative developed as part of the special issue of Open House International – vol. 36-3 entitled *Affordable Housing: Quality and Lifestyle Theories* (Salama, 2011).

The contributions to the narrative can be seen as manifestations for shifting thinking in designing for affordable housing.  In the past, the value of housing is assumed to be in the quantifiable attributes of dwellings, sometimes including their immediate environments. In the new thinking, housing values lie in the relationships between the process, the product, the users, and the social and environmental contexts. In essence, affordable housing has been conceived in terms of what it is, rather than what it does for local populations and the way in which they interact with built and

natural environments. In this respect, the narrative emphasises that by looking at socio-cultural factors, environmental issues, and the typical physical aspects as integral components of affordable housing process promising ends can be reached.


### e) The narrative of diversity in urban environments

With their socio-physical, socio-economic, socio-cultural, and socio-political presence cities have always been highly differentiated places manifesting heterogeneity, diversity of activities, entertainment, excitement, and pleasure. They produce, reproduce, represent, and convey much of what counts today as culture, knowledge, and politics (Al-Maimani et al., 2014; Salama & Gharib, 2012). Urban spaces within cities are no exception; they are places for the pursuit of freedom, un-oppressed activities and desires, but also ones characterised by systematic power, oppression, domination, exclusion, and segregation. In dealing with these polar qualities diversity has become one of the new canons of urban designers and planners and architects. It continues to be at the centre of recent urban debates (Lang, 2005; Talen, 2006; Salama & Wiedmann, 2013).  Little is known, however, on how urban space diversity can be achieved and measured.

In recent rhetoric, diversity denotes a mosaic of people who bring a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, styles, perspectives, values and beliefs as assets to the groups and organisations with which they interact. However, in urban discourses it has been addressed as having multiple meanings that include mixing building types, mixing physical forms, and mixing people of different social classes, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and mixing economic activities (Fainstein, 2004). While some theorists attribute diversity to the socio-physical aspects of homogeneity within heterogeneity, social differentiation without exclusion, and variety, others associate it with socio-political aspects of assimilation, integration, and segregation. While some of these meanings represent a concern for a specific group of professionals including architects and urban designers, urban planners, cultural analysts and abstract theorists, they all agree that each meaning or aspect of diversity is linked to the others; they all call for strategies for urban development that stimulate socio-physical and socio-economic heterogeneity.

With the goal of unveiling lessons learned on urban diversity from various cases in different parts of the world, the special issue of Open House International– vol. 37-2 entitled *Urban Space Diversity: Paradoxes and Realities* addresses the narrative of diversity in the urban environment with the aim of providing a conceptualisation of what it is while articulating its underlying indicators by exploring the variety of meanings adopted in the urban literature. The narrative attempts to establish models for discerning urban space diversity while mapping such models on selected case studies from Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.  It is believed that the contributions identified for this narrative advance the literature on urban diversity. While offering cases from specific contexts in three continents, the narrative invigorates previous urban knowledge and asserts the need to continuously re-assess the urban condition in the quest for urban diversity both in research and practice.


### f) The narrative of urbanism in globalised environments

The narrative of urbanism in globalised environments places emphasis on the Arabian Peninsula/the Gulf region. Covering about three million square kilometres, the

Peninsula is largely a diverse landscape of hot humid sandy coasts, arid desert, sparse scrubland, stone-strewn plains, and lavish oases. In addition to the indigenous local populace, the population is composed of large groups of expatriate Arabs and Asians, in addition to smaller groups of Europeans and North Americans. Exceeding in some Gulf countries 85% of the total population, these expatriate groups represent a major workforce community of skilled professionals and semi-skilled or unskilled labourers from over sixty countries. The region's contemporary economy, dominated by the production of oil and natural gas has created unprecedented wealth, which in turn has led to a significant surge in intensive infrastructural development and the construction of new environments (Wiedmann, 2012; Wiedmann et al., 2012). The ensuing impact of this fast track development on the built environment, in conjunction with the continuous and ostensibly frantic quest for instituting unique urban identities, is regarded as a trigger for developing the special edition of Open House International – vol. 38-4 entitled *Unveiling Urban Transformations in the Arabian Peninsula: Dynamics of Global Flows, Multiple Modernities, and People-Environment Interactions.*

The concerted interest of rulers and top government officials in urban development projects and real estate investment has resulted in a new phase impacting on the development of architecture and urbanism (Salama and Wiedmann, 2013), where cities are continuously witnessing dramatic transformations that represent a diverse array of intents and attitudes. This can be explained by a series of vibrant discussions, characterised by a new unbiased openness, of the contemporary global condition of architecture and urbanism in the Gulf region with its plurality of perspectives and interests.

The narrative discusses the challenges cities on the Arabian Peninsula are facing including the impact on and characteristics of the contemporary global condition and how it is shaping the urban environment of those cities, how architectural and urban identities are constructed through allegorical representations that speak to history and aspire to the future by either rooting interventions into the real or the imagined past or by absorbing the tidal wave of globalisation, and how such a condition is influencing the perception and experience of the average citizen.

While the narrative generates critical issues, it does not offer blue prints or concrete remedy to current challenges or potential urban problems, but it contributes to the advancement of knowledge in architecture and urbanism in a region that enjoys unique richness in its culture, economy, and geopolitical position while facing serious challenges due to its rapid urban growth and the demands of the global condition. Indeed, the value of the contributions lies in establishing a serious discourse that contributes to international discussions while unveiling urban transformations of cities on the Arabian Peninsula at the first decade of the 21$^{st}$ century.  The narrative enabled further discussions on sustainable urbanism within globalised environments (Salama et al., 2016; Wiedmann et al., 2014, 2019).


## 4. Contextual/Conceptual narratives (2016-2019)

Contextual/Conceptual narratives are established through brief analyses of important contributions, which were debated in four special issues (2016-2019) that encompass: a) encompasses architecture and urbanism in the global south and b) the tripartite urban performance and transformation (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Open House International – covers of special issues identified to analyse the contextual/conceptual narratives (Courtesy of Emerald Publishing).

### a) The narrative of architecture and urbanism in the global south

It is always argued that most of the efforts in architectural production, city planning, place making, place management, and urban development are taking place in the Global South and will continue to be so over the next several decades.  The narrative of architecture and urbanism in the global south is echoed in two recent special issues of Open House International – vol. 41-2 and vol. 41-4.

While many cities and settlements in the Global South have less developed or severely limited resources, others are growing and flourishing. Political turmoil, civic disorder, and economic upheaval are prevalent in many of the cities and settlements. Yet, it is widely acknowledged that their societies, emerging markets, transnational practices are viewed as growth prospects, which are continuously manifested in material culture, architecture, and urbanism.  Within the new world order cities and settlements in the Global South have experienced dramatic transformations that instigated critical questions about regenerating and retrofitting cities, international

connectivity, international attractiveness, changing housing dynamics, and the quality of urban life, among other emerging issues resulting from rapid urban development processes.

The preceding milieu calls for the importance of depicting and capturing architectural and place production of the Global South while portraying it to the academic and professional community. The narrative addresses contexts in Africa, South America, South East Asia, and the MENA (Middle East & North African) region highlighting various developmental aspects. It includes research contributions on architecture and urbanism as they relate to housing environments comprising socially integrated housing (Chile), housing typological transformations (Senegal), mega projects and housing development (the Gulf Region), transformations in housing patterns (India), and the changing housing styles in Kathmandu Valley (Nepal). Urban qualities, liveability and capitalist urbanism are addressed in the context of Freetown in Sierra Leone, Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, and several Middle Eastern Cities. The role of planning in maintaining or degrading urban memory is addressed in the context of Cairo (Egypt). Other important contributions include various aspects of sustainability at the building scale (Iran) and at the level of user attitudes (Northern Cyprus).

The sole contribution from South America examines the issue of social integration as part of the contemporary urban policy in Chile by analysing two socially integrated housing developments. Introducing the notion of conviviality it raises critical questions for the implementation of national policy objectives to combat the segregation of cities (Maturana and Horne, 2016).

Emilie Pinard examines the transformation of the housing typology in informal neighbourhoods on the periphery of Dakar, Senegal. Documenting the spatial logics and factors guiding the construction of new multi-storey houses, which are significantly transforming the landscape of the city, the work offers implications for housing policies and programmes (Pinard, 2016). Conteh and Oktay present an attempt at measuring liveability of a vibrant but overcrowded street in Freetown, Sierra Leone, and how its everyday environment works. Employing a mixed-method strategy that involves observations and interviews their work reveals that an overcrowded street space has a negative effect on the liveability and quality of urban life (Conteh and Oktay, 2016).

In the context of the urban evolution of Cairo, Egypt, the narrative offers a critical argument on how unresponsive planning practices adopted by municipalities and governments create wounds and scars in the public realm and thereby negatively influencing the memory of a city (Selim, 2016). The narrative offers an examination of ecological citizenship in the context of Famagusta, Northern Cyprus by conducting an attitude survey of residents. The outcomes offer insights toward understanding the level of residents' environmental worldview that may contribute to the shaping of sustainable planning and design policies (Asilsoy and Oktay, 2016). Malek and Grierson (2016) address the absence of a national framework with respect to sustainable development in Iran. Taking into account the contextual particularities of the context and building on relevant tools developed in other contexts they offer a framework that will inform the development of a context-based tool while integrating Iran's current climate change adaptation policies and priorities.

The narrative accommodates the emerging importance of the context in the Middle East is examined. In reframing the notion of sustainable urban development, Bagaeen, reflects on some underpinning assumptions and inequalities and invites us to consider the aggregate impact of individual master planned projects on the urban fabric of fast growing cities (Bagaeen, 2016). At a regional scale within the Gulf Region,

Wiedmann et al. (2016) examine the emerging housing typologies and their role in redefining urban development processes. Utilising cases from the Jumeirah District in Dubai and based on official planning documents and preliminary field observation their work identifies housing development tendencies and highlight key urban planning implications.

The Asian perspective is represented, in part, in three contributions. Discussing the transformation in lifestyles, the work of Khan and Bele (2016) is based in Nagpur. It adopts a qualitative approach that presents a comparative analysis of three residential neighbourhoods and concludes with an argument that advocates people centricity as an imperative for sustainability. Examining the changing housing styles in the Kathmandu Valley – Nepal, Bhattarai-Upadhyay and Sengupta (2016) engage in a discussion that cuts across space, time, and meaning of architecture in order to deconstruct and juxtapose tradition and modernity as represented in culture and built form. Based on qualitative inquiry the work of Ujang (2016) examines the relationship between urbanities and historical urban places in the context of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Offering key insights Ujang discusses the way in which such places shape the perception, emotion, and memory of the residents, and concludes by identifying challenges of integrating the preservation of place identity into the complexity of the physical environment and the urban life.

It is clearly evident that the discourse on architecture and urbanism in the Global South has gone beyond portraying this part of the world within either post-colonial urban struggle or slum challenges. In essence, the Global south offers a rich soil for debating and researching challenging and pressing issues that present themselves as timely topics on the map academic and professional interests and as important material for further inquiry and examination.

### b) The narrative of tripartite urban performance and transformation

The urban performance and transformation narrative is reflected in two recent special issues of Open House International – vol. 44-1, *Research Perspectives on Urban Performance: Between the Imagined, the Measured, and the Experienced* and vol. 44-4, *Urban Transformations in Rapidly Growing Contexts*. The narrative adopts the premise that a multitude of diverse attributes is required for efficient urban performance at various scales ranging from the immediate context of buildings to central urban spaces, and from urban corridors to residential neighbourhoods. These qualities can be framed under a cycle of three main symbiotic pillars: the imagined, the measured, and the experienced, which elucidate various parameters for exploring urban performance. These three pillars stem from the Lefebvrian conceptions on the production of space, which postulate a triadic integrationist relationship of three different but related types of spaces: the conceived (Imagined), the perceived (measured) and the lived (experienced).

Primarily, Lefebvre defined 'conceived space' as the space which is theorised by scientists and planners, known as 'representations of space', representations that are intangible and are entrenched in the principles, imperatives, beliefs and visions of experts, decision makers, and those who are in a position to impose their personal notion of 'order' onto the concrete reality. The second is 'perceived space', the space of 'spatial practice' defined as the space where movement and interaction takes place, where networks develop and materialise. Consequently, it includes both daily routines at an individual level and urban realities such as the networks that link places

designated for work, leisure and 'private' life (Lefebvre, 1991:38). The third is 'lived space', which is explained as the unconscious, non-verbal direct relation between people and space. This is the space that is occupied through associated images and symbols (Lefebvre, 1991:39). The current body of knowledge on Lefebvre's work suggests that the 'conceived space' is abstract and tactical and where authority functions, the 'perceived space' is a pragmatic, physical space encompassing flows of investment, workforce, and information and that this where the conceived and lived spaces are construed. Salama and Wiedmann (2013) suggest that the 'lived space' is the most subjective space, involving the actual experience of individuals that is performed in the 'perceived space' and as a result of the 'conceived space'.

In this narrative emphasis is placed on the contributions published in OHI vol. 44-1. Addressing various contexts in Europe and the Middle East, the contributions represent diverse efforts undertaken by scholars in universities and academic institutions in Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Libya, Qatar, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.

At a regional scale, El-Kholei and Yassine (2019) examine efforts towards developing smart and sustainable cities (SSC) in the Arab region. They argue that a sustainable city is not attainable in the presence of an illiteracy and poverty that characterise different parts of the Arab world. At a city scale, Yaprak Öz and Demirkan (2019) propose a framework to act as a strategic decision support mechanism for effective urban service design. Their work calls for the need for a shared understanding and appreciation of what a service is and what constitutes it among service providers and consumers.

Quality of Life (UOL) and Quality of Urban Life (QUOL) appear to characterise urban performance discourse in two contributions. At an urban setting scale, MacLean and Salama (2019) raise questions about the quality of life (QOL) of residents and the liveability of their environments in non-Western contexts. They argue that the preponderance of existing empirical studies and measurement frameworks have been developed based on Western standards. They propose a multi-dimensional, context specific model based on the premise that QOUL studies should balance universal values and context-specificities. It is this context specificity that emerges in the study of Gür, Taneli, and Dostoğlu (2019), which is also conducted at an urban setting scale. They develop a conceptual model and validate it through its implementation in the context of Doğanbey in Bursa.

In two very different contexts; Ankara, Turkey and Basra, Iraq, walkability, including attitudes towards walking, and walking behaviour, is the focus of two contributions. The work of Seles and Afacan (2019) calls for expanding the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) by including attributes that pertain to a healthy urban performance of residential neighbourhoods as an additional predictor for walking behaviour. Al-Saraify and Grierson (2019) place emphasis on walking to occupational activities by advocating the need for a reliable subjective instrument to gather information on walking to occupational activities on the neighbourhood scale. NWOAQ, Neighbourhood Walking to Occupational Activities Questionnaire, was developed as a data collection mechanism backed by indicators stemming from the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB).

The work of van Riel and Salama (2019) unveils various aspects of belonging and exclusion in the context of Accra, Ghana, with a focus on its youth. It examines young people's 'lived' experience of urban spaces through the use of auto-photography as an appropriate method relevant to the investigation. Their work represents a call for

urban professionals and decision makers to produce inclusive urban environments that cater for all while allowing for differences and belonging to co-exist. In a contrasting environment, Madrazo (2019) examines three neighbourhoods in Barcelona. His work conveys that the residents of these neighbourhoods in the city of Barcelona–Trinitat Nova, Plus Ultra and Vallcarca– have struggled against the threat of radical urban renewals planned by the municipal authorities for decades. Madrazo call for the need to develop skills and methods to enable them to form part of the open and participatory planning systems.

Focusing on the scale of urban open spaces, two contributions advocate structured methods to gather qualitative information through various assessment approaches. The work of Remali and Abudib (2019) cross-examines the characteristics of six different neighbourhoods within the city of Tripoli and establishes a profile for each, focusing on the way in which key principles and values are perceived. They call for assessing existing residential districts as a step towards effective regeneration of existing neighbourhoods or creating new ones. Likewise, Gharib (2019) scrutinises the qualities of urban open spaces of two traditional markets in Qatar by conducting behavioural mapping and impressionistic assessment procedures.

By and large, the narrative successfully addresses key aspects of urban performance, but the challenge remains; the clarity in articulating the associations – how the qualities underlying one of the three pillars -- the conceived (imagined), the perceived (measured) and the lived (experienced) – have implications on the other two. Notably, the three pillars function as parts of a cycle. The results of the study into the lived (individual experiences of the environment) and the perceived (networks and flows) should feedback into the conceived (policies, strategies, and visions) again. In many cases, the lived and the perceived are an outcome of a non-responsive conceived, and the cycle will do well when implications are better interconnected.


## 5. The open-ended narrative (2020-onward)

The open-ended narrative represents concepts, issues, and themes generated within the contributions published in this edition of Open House International. Reflections are developed to capture the salient features of each contribution in terms of themes or approaches to investigation.

Three contributions are situated within the Chinese context. On the one hand, Wiedmann and Wang (2020) argue for the possibility of achieving integrated urbanism in Chinese edge cities, which are produced in a very limited timespan. They explore one of the Beijing's biggest edge cities: the Yizhuang Development Area. Adopting an integrated approach to investigation, their work amalgamates various mapping efforts and field studies. They call for a better integration of urban development through urban design initiatives that enable enhanced urban qualities and achieve diversity and social interaction as key characteristics of contemporary urban life. On the other hand, Zhoua et al., (2020) advocates sustainable renewal of industrial land as part of the master planning process while arguing for the need to consider not only the site determinants but also the larger scale of township planning. Espousing a research-based practice approach through the case of Lijia in Changzhou City, Zhoua et al., develop and implement an assessment framework that embeds an econometric model, which includes economic, social and ecological aspects and is coupled with field

observations and in-depth interviews.  Along the same approach of research-based practice, the work Tang et al., (2020) engages with the notion of memory place-making. They develop an understanding of the relationship between memory and place and utilise this into a memory design project for a site at Nanjing Yangtze River Bridge. In essence, the work develops a new approach to urban public spaces, in which the notion of memory is materialised in its fullest sense; debating the way in which memory communicates content and information through the interplay between body and mind of participants and the physical environment.

The narrative expands to address various aspects of academic research and design thinking. On the one hand, Hurol (2020) presents a critical discussion related to the ontological approach to architectural research, which addresses the reductionist approach and the split of technical issues from those of arts and humanities. Hurol discusses the main characteristics of the ontological approach to architectural research by explaining its possibilities in relation to the contents, methodologies and subject position in research. This work was interrogated in a PhD course through which it reveals the impact of the spontaneous ideology of architecture for such a split.  On the one hand, at the level of design thinking, Tünger and Taşlı Pektaş (2020) presents a study that compares cognitive behaviours of designers in geometry based environment, represented by Rhinoceros, and parametric design environment, represented by Grasshopper environments. Retrospective protocol analysis method is utilised following a content oriented approach. The study reveals that participants performed in considerably different ways within these two environments. The two environments different advantages and disadvantages during the design process.

Examining the tectonic effects of openings as "built-things", Ghelichkhani (2020), reflects on the Çavuşoğlu House in Cyprus taken as a phenomenological case-study to explain the immediate experiences of dwellers of the "poiesis" and "poetic revealing" through the various openings in this contemporary piece of architecture. The openings in this building are studied according to their tectonic affects, whether poetic, due to change/time, and due to dominance. Relevant to the psychology of place, the study is undertaken by observing the openings in their places, by interviewing the users and architects, and by sketching the tectonic qualities of these openings. While Ghelichkhani's study is undertaken at the building scale, El-Ashmouni and Salama (2020) examine the evolutionary aspects of contemporary architecture of Cairo over the past three decades.  They debate the plurality of "isms" within the architectural discourses by adopting three lines of inquiry: chronological, interventional, and representational while underpinned by the discourses of decolonization and cosmopolitanism. The critical analysis conveys that both constructs originate from the contradiction resulted from modernisation and the development of the secular everyday life and that this will continue to affect Cairene architecture while generating various architectural possibilities.

 In the context of Amman, Jordan, Al-Betawi et al., (2020) examine transformations in apartment buildings as a reflection of social change. The investigation involves 170 apartment buildings and is based on design attributes and lifestyles between 1970-2020. Their work demonstrates that Jordanian people became more open to social life within the public realm while preferring more privacy for their family life.  In a different context, El-Kholei (2020) presents a critique of approaches to participatory planning by questioning the differences between residents' perception of their environment and findings based on fieldwork including aspects relevant to residents' awareness and their ability to make meaningful recommendations. Taking

the context of Askar in Bahrain El-Kholei argues that residents' opinion might be useful in addressing problems, but that cannot be directly used for decision making.

Utilising different arguments the environmental and social dimensions of sustainability are addressed in three contributions. Ince et al., (2020) introduce sustainable Cittaslow approach to the development of cities, which emphasises local particularities and relevance to tourism. Questioning the effects of Cittaslow philosophy on the sustainability of cities in North Cyprus their study is based on collecting data from the five slow cities in North Cyprus and then testing analysis against the relevance of Cittaslow philosophy to tourism. Hartsell (2020) explores the human/nature and human/urban relationships and how these manifest in the environment as tectonic elements. Secular and non-secular relationships between people and nature are explored. Urban green space and the associated effects are seen as a part of the ontological whole of the city. The exploration reveals that characteristics of the Savanna Hypothesis can be implemented in urban planning and design to improve the overall quality of urban life. A critical review of the key trends of integrating photovoltaic facilities into the built environment in developed contexts is presented in the study of Krstić-Furundžić et al., (2020). The thrust of the study is that achieving sustainable energy transition in cities requires an increase in the supply of energy from renewable sources. Integral to the analysis is a critique of the opportunities and constraints of integrating PV renewable systems into the built environment as well as design conditions and tools.

The twelve contributions generate a narrative that further validates the pluralistic dimension of built environment research. It is clearly evident that the open-ended narrative generates various possibilities for future themes and approaches to investigation that range from conceptual arguments and critical analysis to experimentation and empirical testing, across a wide array of contexts.

## 6. Outlook: Prospects for polyphonic narrative for built environment research

Constructing polyphonic narratives in built environment research based on contemporary knowledge, as portrayed in previous contributions of Open House International over that past fifteen years, is an important endeavour since it captures the essence of themes within these narratives and articulating them in an epigrammatic analysis. The narratives established in this article were classified under three categories: a) leitmotif narratives, which represents specific recurrent themes that keep presenting themselves on the map of built environment research, b) conceptual/contextual narratives, which represents specific concepts or notions that are debated individually or linked with other theories, and the open-ended narrative, which represents concepts, issues, and themes generated within the articles published in this edition of Open House International. Thematic sub narratives within the overarching categories include:

- Leitmotif narratives
    *Design studio pedagogy; sustainable environments for tourism; responsive learning environments; affordable housing environments; diversity in urban environments; and architecture and urbanism in globalised environments*

- Contextual/Conceptual narratives
  *Architecture and urbanism in the global south; tripartite urban performance and transformation*

- The open-ended narrative
  *Urbanism in edge cities; sustainable urban renewal of industrial areas; place making and memory; ontological approaches to academic research; tectonic realities and spatial experiences; social constructs and architectural trends; physical transformations as indicators for social change; relevance of community and participatory design and planning practices; philosophies and theories influencing architecture and urbanism*

The articulation of the preceding narratives stimulates a sustained quest for re-thinking concepts, notions, and issues of concerns while invigorating research prospects endeavours and setting the future directions of Open House International. While these narratives are presented as examples that delineate the scope and focus as well as the plurality and diversity of built environment research, it should not be seen as exclusive. Collectively the polyphonic narratives should be viewed as a platform for seeds of ideas that exemplify the potential to trigger improvement and enhancement of built environment research.

Open House International (OHI) will continue to be an interdisciplinary journal for built environment research speaking to the disciplines and areas of interest in architecture, building technology, housing, urban design and planning. The preceding narratives are expanded to reflect the new staging of OHI aim of establishing effective links between theory and design and education and practice in these fields while emphasis on international collaboration and global south/global north dialectics. The aim is envisaged through two overarching objectives:

- Promote research and practice towards addressing the full spectrum of sustainable development and whenever possible relate to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).
- Improve the quality of built environment through encouraging greater sharing of decision making by ordinary people. It also aims at developing the necessary institutional frameworks, which will support the local initiatives of parties in the housing and place production processes.

Stemming from the three categories of polyphonic narratives presented in this article, and materialising OHI objectives, two areas representing important lines of inquiry are envisaged towards the future:

- *Socially and Culturally Sustainable Architecture and Urbanism:*
  This area involves a range of topics that include action planning; affordable homes; building and urban design; building design & planning for social sustainability; culture and built form; gender issues in design; habitat agenda; housing planning and production; slum improvement and redevelopment; socio-spatial justice; user participation; vernacular architecture and self-built housing development.

- *Built Environment Tectonics and Technologies:*
  This area involves topics that include building technologies and materiality; building performance and energy simulation and conservation strategies; environmental planning and design; open building; prefabrication and industrialisation; restoration and conservation technologies; tectonics of traditional and contemporary architecture; and application of information technologies in design and construction processes.

This edition of Open House International commemorates a new beginning in various terms including form and content, a more systematized rigorous peer review process, an enhanced quality of production, and global reach. One of the vital new aspects toward the development of robust research writing in the field is the standard structured prerequisite adopted by Emerald that requires contributors to think more clearly about their work. While such clarity and sharpness is expected throughout the manuscripts submitted and reviewed, the structured abstract approach is an invitation for a more vital uniformity by identifying and developing clear statements on purposes and objectives, frameworks and methodological approaches to investigation, findings and outcomes, and value and originality.

It has been a great honour and privilege to continue to be part of Open House International since for over 15 years, throughout the process of its transition to Emerald, and to continue now to contribute in a chief editorial capacity after this transition. Our sincere thanks go to Emerald's team involved in Open House International review, editing, production and publishing, in particular Gemma Hemming, Senior Publisher; Ashleigh Weller, Content Editor; and Danielle Crow, Publishing Assistant. Our appreciation goes to the collaborating editors and international review board. Their support and guidance are critical towards achieving excellence in built environment research. Last, but not the least, a warm welcome to the new members of review board.

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Figure 1. Open House International – covers of special issues identified to capture the leitmotif narrative (Courtesy of Emerald Publishing).

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*Architecture and Urbanism of the Global South, A.M. Salama and D. Grierson, 2016*

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Figure 2. Open House International – covers of special issues identified to analyse the contextual/conceptual narratives (Courtesy of Emerald Publishing).

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