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Accommodating a durable community

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Accommodating a durable community

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To reflect on the future of **Environment and Planning B (EPB)**, I had to dig into its past. This is in part because the journal only entered my radar about a decade ago, when fellow PhD students from our Geodiversity project managed to publish an Agent-based Modelling (ABM) piece in the journal ([Schmitt et al., 2015](#)). The joy and pride of the team made me feel like this journal was a special place to have your research featured. With the online archive,¹ I attempted to reconstruct how the journal and the field developed, how people predicted where we would be now. And I found just what I was looking for! Indeed, when you read Mike [Batty's \(1998\)](#) editorial for the 25th anniversary, you are given a free tour of the story of **EPB's** origin, from a spin-off of EPA to tackle the architectural scale of design at its beginnings under the editorship of Lionel March, to its later development as an outlet whose broader goal was, in a nutshell, to understand how cities work in order to make them better. The first 10 years of **EPB** illustrate the transition from a quarterly journal to an established publication for urban research, with more issues per year, more editors, in a publishing landscape divided, from 1983 to 2018, between Economy and Space (EPA), **Design and Planning (EPB)**, Politics and Space (EPC) and Society and Space (EPD).² In terms of content, the journal experienced a transition from theories of design to '*formal languages for planning*' ([Batty, 1998: 1](#)). Although the journal is now operated in a collegial way, with a team of editors covering dedicated sections and leading special issues, the 1980s were a time of even more distributed leadership, with the majority of editorials actually written by guest editors. These guest editorials document the growing potential of computer usage in planning and design (e.g. [Johnson, 1986](#); [Stiny, 1986](#); [Yeh, 1988](#)) – an 'unashamed' transition of the journal's scope ([Batty, 1998](#)).

In the 'photographic and pen portrait[s]' of the new team of editors in 1992 (I recommend looking at the photographic portraits!), Mike Batty is described as '*editing the journal since 1982 when he became Coeditor to the founding Editor Lionel March, and then Editor from 1988. His research interests involve computer and mathematical methods in planning and design, computer graphics in the representation of spatial systems, and formal models of the planning process*' ([Editors, 1992: 120](#)). This description matches the change of focus of the journal in the 1990s which seems to culminate, both for Mike and **EPB**, with the creation of CASA,³ where the journal administration eventually moves to in 2004 ([Batty, 2004: 1](#)). From the 2000s onwards, the main topics dealt with in articles published in **EPB** are urban simulation, cybergeographies, Cellular Automata and Agent Based Modelling (CA-ABM), urban data, urban scaling, participatory GIS

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etc., alternating with more topical issues. This is the content I recognise from my first encounter with the journal in the early 2010s. The 2010s themselves are characterised in EPB by a core focus on cities and the city scale (originally reserved for EPA), with articles published on the topics of urban growth, optimal cities, shrinking cities, residential segregation, etc. Urban models are a prominent feature of the journal in this period, along with the methodological apparatus to build them, analyse them and visualise them. Finally, although EPB is a journal recognised internationally, its editorial team, and cyclical editorials on ‘Divided Britain’, British universities and the reoccurring bouts of defunding of UK research, anchors it firmly in the UK academic landscape. In the past 5 years, EPB has changed its identity once more, adopting a new subtitle (‘Urban Analytics & City science’), welcoming new editors and new editorial board members and creating a new section (‘Urban Data/Code’) dedicated to data and software papers. These changes reflect a concern towards inclusivity and open science practices, in an environment now controlled by a large private publisher.⁴

What is fascinating to analyse in retrospect are the aspects of this evolution which were pretty well forecasted 25 years ago. Mike Batty’s anniversary editorial suggests for instance that *‘research which is concerned with the impact of the digital revolution on the city itself, on its infrastructure [...] will be one of the great themes of planning and design in the postindustrial world of the 21st century’* (Batty, 1998: 7) or that *‘a massive synthesis of computational modelling, routine use of information in cities, cooperative and participatory design, all linked through and forming a part of the emerging digital infrastructure which will characterise the urban world of the 21st century. In all of this, this journal has an enormous role to play’* (ibid., p. 8). Indeed, urban big data, cooperative mapping and real time visualisation have developed and been integrated in various ways since 1998, from the collaborative project of OpenStreetMap (2004) to the corporate versions of smart cities (2010s), and their evolution was well documented in EPB. An aspect that was not well anticipated though was the level of inequalities, inequities and power imbalances that these developments would produce, from platform-induced gentrification to urban surveillance... which were subsequently documented in EPB.

Now, where is the field going? What will EPB look like in 25 years? These questions are tricky and related, but answering the second one is easier because we have a form of influence on it. For instance, the invitation of seven female academics to join the editorial board in 2021 has contributed to improve one dimension of inclusivity of the journal. This means that female academics are now better represented among the people invited to reflect on the past and future of EPB, compared to the 25th anniversary.⁵ We can, and we should, therefore predict (and make sure) that the 75th anniversary will better represent research and researchers from Global South institutions, from non-privileged backgrounds and from minorities, than they are today. Similarly, we can assume that the current and future editors of EPB will contribute, through their own thinking, research and collaborations, to drive the future *‘traditions, transitions, translations and transformations’* of the journal in the way Mike Batty has done for over 40 years. One element of stability that I foresee is that the field of urban analytics and city science will remain multi- and inter-disciplinary. However, I think researchers from various disciplines will not be invited to contribute to the journal because EPB aims to *‘accommodat[e] a fragile community’* (Batty, 1998: 1), as it did in 1998. Nowadays, with scholarship on urban analytics and city science being ever more specialised, no urban scholar can keep up on their own with the developments of urban simulation techniques, geocomputation methods, theories and data infrastructure that the field keeps creating and refining. The community working on these topics has increased and gains traction, so EPB might actually now serve the opposite purpose of keeping us in touch with each other’s research, of grounding us in a **durable** community.

Finally, I have two personal takes on how the field might evolve in the next decades, or at least where I would like the field to go. The first aspect relates to the original mission of EPB, which is to use formalisation in urban research *‘united by an interest in design, in ways of developing better*

cities and buildings, by a concern for how we might design and plan best (Batty, 1998: 4). Even though design is not at the forefront of the journal's mission anymore, I think that the journal is still a perfect outlet for research on how our formal, quantified and modelled understanding of cities can tackle big urban questions: What makes diverse people engaged in urban communities? How do cities foster and diffuse innovations? How can we make cities accessible for all? How can we prevent social fragmentation? How can we maintain urbanity in cities with changing demographics? The second aspect is integrative urban research. The past decades have seen the development of countless new methods, tools, platforms, data sources and models, which are sometimes deprecated, forgotten or ignored immediately after they are showcased. If we want to tackle big questions, I think we have to make better use of existing research, by comparing cases, by standardising methods and working on their articulation, by benchmarking urban models against each other and by organising our knowledge base on cities. I have argued elsewhere (Cottineau, 2024; Cottineau et al., 2024) that there are tools and approaches out there which can help us in this endeavour, such as systematic literature reviews – to extract information from research published outside our scope – biographies/trajectories of urban models or modular modelling from Reusable Building Blocks.⁶ I think this integration is necessary to keep track of the common goals that we are pursuing in studying cities. To make the parallel with cities themselves, let's say that despite our different views and disagreements on how to delineate cities, we can agree that there is such a thing as cities and that they share traits across time and space. Our field is similar: it is not easy to define and delineate, it is prone to contradictions and disagreements, yet it exists and we can recognise its achievements when we see them. **Environment and Planning** could be a place to accommodate the diversity of our community in a **durable** manner.

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Notes

1. <https://journals.sagepub.com/loi/epbb/group/d1970.y1974>.
2. The latest addition to the group, Nature and Space (EPE) and Philosophy, Theory, Models, Methods and Practice (EPF) were created respectively in 2018 and 2021.
3. The Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis, at University College London, since 1995.
4. EPB's original publisher Pion was taken over by SAGE in 2015, cf. <https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/press/sage-strengthens-geography-and-psychology-portfolio-with-acquisition-of-pion>.
5. <https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/epba/25/7>.
6. See, for instance, these initiatives by Uta Berger et al. (rbb4abm.com) and Tatiana Filatova et al. (agentblocks.org) in the field of agent-based modelling.

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Clementine Cottineau is a quantitative urban geographer, assistant professor of urban studies at TU-Delft. In her current research, she models the evolution and causal relationships between economic segregation and economic inequality in cities, using systematic literature reviews, longitudinal analysis of empirical microdata and generative agent-based modelling. She holds a PhD in Geography from the University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne (2014), where she analysed and modelled the evolution of urbanisation and urban shrinkage in the (post-)Soviet space. During previous research positions at UCL's Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis and CNRS's Centre Maurice Halbwachs, she has worked on the patterns and regularities of urban scaling, industrial geographies and the history of urban models.