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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

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4 introducing brief outlines of the articles published in Volume 45, Issues 1&2. A broad  
5 concluding outlook drawn from the narratives is developed while echoing the diversity  
6 and plurality of built environment research.  
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## 9 **2. The notion of polyphony as an approach to classification and** 10 **analysis** 11

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13 The diverse nature of contemporary built environment related knowledge, and its  
14 epistemological foundations, is now palpable in most discourses generated by research  
15 of all types, scholarly-conceptual and exploratory-empirical. Discussing and debating  
16 various themes is a step towards further articulation that enables expansion and  
17 enhanced focus of these themes. Through a classification procedure of selected special  
18 issues published by OHI between 2006 and 2019, 10 issues were identified. Based on  
19 reviewing the editorials and the key contents of more than 100 articles within these  
20 special issues as well as the content of this edition, the analysis engages through critical  
21 reflection with various themes that resonate the pluralistic nature of built environment  
22 research.  
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25 Utilising polyphony as a metaphor for discussion seems to be relevant. As a term  
26 from the discipline of music, it represents a type of melodious texture consisting of two  
27 or more simultaneous voices of independent melody, as opposed to a musical texture  
28 with just one voice, monophony; one prevailing melodic voice (Albright, 2004). The  
29 narratives are described as representing a polyphonic condition since they involve  
30 various approaches, ideological positions, methodological tools, and critical  
31 elucidations. In some cases, positions, approaches, and tools drift into dual  
32 interpretations. Yet, in other cases they converge in harmony to form a holistic  
33 discourse. However, within the polyphonic condition, there are sub classifications.  
34 Conceptually and for grouping purposes the narratives are clustered under three  
35 categories:  
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39 • The first category is leitmotif narratives, which represents specific recurrent  
40 themes that keep presenting themselves on the map of built environment  
41 research. This category is discussed through six special issues (2006-2016)  
42 that address specific themes.  
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- 44 • The second category is conceptual/contextual narratives, which represents  
45 specific concepts or notions that are debated individually or linked with other  
46 theories. This category is argued through four special issues (2016-2019) that  
47 address specific theories, fields of inquiry, and contexts.  
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- 49 • The third category is the open-ended narrative, which represents concepts,  
50 issues, and themes generated within the articles published in this edition of  
51 Open House International (Vol. 45, No. 1&2).  
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## 55 **3. Leitmotif narratives (2006-2016)** 56

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

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

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

37 Ecotourism, said to be first coined as a term by Hector Ceballos Lascurain, promotes  
38 environmental responsibility and ensures that visitors take nothing but photographs,  
39 and leave nothing but footprints (Ceballos Lascurain, 1996). The narrative that  
40 addresses the relationship between ecotourism and sustainable development can be  
41 found in the many elucidations of ecotourism and the associated cases discussed in the  
42 special issue of Open House International – vol. 32-4 entitled *Ecotourism and Ecolodges:  
43 Sustainable Planning and Design for Environmentally Friendly Tourism Facilities*.  
44 Following reports of international organisations (WTTC, 1992; WTO, 1996;), the  
45 narrative avows that ecotourism is a sub component of sustainable development and  
46 that it should be regarded as a key player in the understanding of human history and  
47 its interaction with natural environments.  
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51 The generic concept of environmentally sustainable tourism has emerged in  
52 parallel to the realisation of the potential benefits in combining people interest in  
53 nature with their concern for the environment. It is a responsible way of travel that  
54 appeals to people who love nature and indigenous cultures allowing them to enjoy an  
55 attraction or a locality and ensures that local cultures and environments are unaffected  
56 negatively. As the sustainable tourism industry expands worldwide, ecologically  
57 sensitive facilities continue to be in high demand that can be met with ecolodges: small-  
58 scale facilities that provide tourists with the opportunity of being in close contact with  
59 nature and local culture. The narrative attempts to answer the question: *How much*  
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4 *change in or alternations of natural and cultural environments will be acceptable?* It  
5 explores sustainable planning and design for tourism by debating, analysing, and  
6 envisioning a wide spectrum of issues, with a focus on the developments taking place in  
7 biologically sensitive areas, whether desert, forest, tropical coasts, or rural  
8 environments. Covering the planet earth from Australia through the Arab World and  
9 Turkey to Argentina and Chile, the shared denominator within the contributions is that  
10 emphasis is placed upon integrating people, nature, and local economy into responsive  
11 development processes.  
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13 The narrative acknowledges that sustainable tourism or eco-tourism is not an  
14 option but a necessity, especially in contexts that enjoy unique richness in natural and  
15 cultural resources. A true ecotourism and ecolodge culture has to spread amongst  
16 different decision making sectors so that all key players (local authorities, NGOs,  
17 private sector, professionals, local communities) are properly involved, and are  
18 benefited from the process. It should be emphasised though that the creation of  
19 guidance documents does not mean the end of the process. Guidelines do not provide  
20 blue prints on how sustainable tourism can be implemented or how environmentally  
21 friendly facilities can be realised. Awareness and training programs are needed in the  
22 field of sustainable development for tourism purposes. This would enable the  
23 development of positive attitudes of all parties involved toward the responsibility to  
24 the environment.  
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### 29 ***c) The narrative of responsive learning Environments***

30 The educational process involves mental and cognitive activities that include  
31 knowledge acquisition and assimilation, testing students' motivation and academic  
32 performance, and faculty and teachers' productivity. Applicable to school buildings and  
33 university campuses, the way in which the planning and design is approached and the  
34 way we perceive learning environments make powerful statements about how we view  
35 education. How educational buildings are designed tells us much about how teaching  
36 and learning activities take place. While it was said several decades ago that a good  
37 teacher could teach anywhere, a growing body of knowledge suggests a direct  
38 correlation between the physical aspects of the learning environment, teaching  
39 processes, and learning outcomes. In its commitment to introduce timely and pressing  
40 issues on built environment research, the special issue of Open House International –  
41 vol. 34-1, entitled *Shaping the Future of Learning Environments: Emerging Paradigms  
42 and Best Practices*; discourses on sustainable learning environments are presented. A  
43 worldwide commitment to designing responsive environments conducive to learning is  
44 witnessed in many academic and professional settings (Sanoff, 2001, 2002; Knapp,  
45 Noschis, & Pasalar, 2007).  
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50 The narrative manifests the trans-disciplinary paradigm where knowledge  
51 about learning environments crosses the boundaries of disciplines including pedagogy,  
52 psychology, behavioural sciences, planning, and design. Remarkably, reference to the  
53 work of scientists and education theorists is palpable in the work presented (Dewey,  
54 1916; Friere, 1971; Gardner, 1983; Edwards & Usher, 2001; Kolb and Kolb 2005;  
55 Stevenson, 2008). The narrative unveils qualities and characteristics of learning  
56 environments at different scales and in different contexts, from classroom typologies to  
57 campus outdoor spaces. Placing emphasis on emerging archetypes in learning  
58 environments the narrative scrutinises issues that pertain to the academic house  
59 clustering, the school as heart of the community, the rising interest in new classroom  
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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

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4 natural environments. In this respect, the narrative emphasises that by looking at  
5 socio-cultural factors, environmental issues, and the typical physical aspects as integral  
6 components of affordable housing process promising ends can be reached.  
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10 ***e) The narrative of diversity in urban environments***

11 With their socio-physical, socio-economic, socio-cultural, and socio-political presence  
12 cities have always been highly differentiated places manifesting heterogeneity,  
13 diversity of activities, entertainment, excitement, and pleasure. They produce,  
14 reproduce, represent, and convey much of what counts today as culture, knowledge,  
15 and politics (Al-Maimani et al., 2014; Salama & Gharib, 2012). Urban spaces within  
16 cities are no exception; they are places for the pursuit of freedom, un-oppressed  
17 activities and desires, but also ones characterised by systematic power, oppression,  
18 domination, exclusion, and segregation. In dealing with these polar qualities diversity  
19 has become one of the new canons of urban designers and planners and architects. It  
20 continues to be at the centre of recent urban debates (Lang, 2005; Talen, 2006; Salama  
21 & Wiedmann, 2013). Little is known, however, on how urban space diversity can be  
22 achieved and measured.  
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25 In recent rhetoric, diversity denotes a mosaic of people who bring a variety of  
26 ethnic and cultural backgrounds, styles, perspectives, values and beliefs as assets to the  
27 groups and organisations with which they interact. However, in urban discourses it has  
28 been addressed as having multiple meanings that include mixing building types, mixing  
29 physical forms, and mixing people of different social classes, racial and ethnic  
30 backgrounds, and mixing economic activities (Fainstein, 2004). While some theorists  
31 attribute diversity to the socio-physical aspects of homogeneity within heterogeneity,  
32 social differentiation without exclusion, and variety, others associate it with socio-  
33 political aspects of assimilation, integration, and segregation. While some of these  
34 meanings represent a concern for a specific group of professionals including architects  
35 and urban designers, urban planners, cultural analysts and abstract theorists, they all  
36 agree that each meaning or aspect of diversity is linked to the others; they all call for  
37 strategies for urban development that stimulate socio-physical and socio-economic  
38 heterogeneity.  
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41 With the goal of unveiling lessons learned on urban diversity from various cases  
42 in different parts of the world, the special issue of Open House International– vol. 37-2  
43 entitled *Urban Space Diversity: Paradoxes and Realities* addresses the narrative of  
44 diversity in the urban environment with the aim of providing a conceptualisation of  
45 what it is while articulating its underlying indicators by exploring the variety of  
46 meanings adopted in the urban literature. The narrative attempts to establish models  
47 for discerning urban space diversity while mapping such models on selected case  
48 studies from Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. It is believed that the contributions  
49 identified for this narrative advance the literature on urban diversity. While offering  
50 cases from specific contexts in three continents, the narrative invigorates previous  
51 urban knowledge and asserts the need to continuously re-assess the urban condition in  
52 the quest for urban diversity both in research and practice.  
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58 ***f) The narrative of urbanism in globalised environments***

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



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

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

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

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

#### 51 52 53 **4. Contextual/Conceptual narratives (2016-2019)**

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

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

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

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

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

35 In the context of the urban evolution of Cairo, Egypt, the narrative offers a  
36 critical argument on how unresponsive planning practices adopted by municipalities  
37 and governments create wounds and scars in the public realm and thereby negatively  
38 influencing the memory of a city (Selim, 2016). The narrative offers an examination of  
39 ecological citizenship in the context of Famagusta, Northern Cyprus by conducting an  
40 attitude survey of residents. The outcomes offer insights toward understanding the  
41 level of residents' environmental worldview that may contribute to the shaping of  
42 sustainable planning and design policies (Asilsoy and Oktay, 2016). Malek and Grierson  
43 (2016) address the absence of a national framework with respect to sustainable  
44 development in Iran. Taking into account the contextual particularities of the context  
45 and building on relevant tools developed in other contexts they offer a framework that  
46 will inform the development of a context-based tool while integrating Iran's current  
47 climate change adaptation policies and priorities.

48 The narrative accommodates the emerging importance of the context in the  
49 Middle East is examined. In reframing the notion of sustainable urban development,  
50 Bagaeeen, reflects on some underpinning assumptions and inequalities and invites us to  
51 consider the aggregate impact of individual master planned projects on the urban  
52 fabric of fast growing cities (Bagaeeen, 2016). At a regional scale within the Gulf Region,  
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4 Wiedmann et al. (2016) examine the emerging housing typologies and their role in  
5 redefining urban development processes. Utilising cases from the Jumeirah District in  
6 Dubai and based on official planning documents and preliminary field observation their  
7 work identifies housing development tendencies and highlight key urban planning  
8 implications.

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

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

### 32 33 34 35 **b) The narrative of tripartite urban performance and transformation**

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

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51 Primarily, Lefebvre defined 'conceived space' as the space which is theorised by  
52 scientists and planners, known as 'representations of space', representations that are  
53 intangible and are entrenched in the principles, imperatives, beliefs and visions of  
54 experts, decision makers, and those who are in a position to impose their personal  
55 notion of 'order' onto the concrete reality. The second is 'perceived space', the space of  
56 'spatial practice' defined as the space where movement and interaction takes place,  
57 where networks develop and materialise. Consequently, it includes both daily routines  
58 at an individual level and urban realities such as the networks that link places  
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4 designated for work, leisure and 'private' life (Lefebvre, 1991:38). The third is 'lived  
5 space', which is explained as the unconscious, non-verbal direct relation between  
6 people and space. This is the space that is occupied through associated images and  
7 symbols (Lefebvre, 1991:39). The current body of knowledge on Lefebvre's work  
8 suggests that the 'conceived space' is abstract and tactical and where authority  
9 functions, the 'perceived space' is a pragmatic, physical space encompassing flows of  
10 investment, workforce, and information and that this where the conceived and lived  
11 spaces are construed. Salama and Wiedmann (2013) suggest that the 'lived space' is the  
12 most subjective space, involving the actual experience of individuals that is performed  
13 in the 'perceived space' and as a result of the 'conceived space'.  
14

15 In this narrative emphasis is placed on the contributions published in OHI vol.  
16 44-1. Addressing various contexts in Europe and the Middle East, the contributions  
17 represent diverse efforts undertaken by scholars in universities and academic  
18 institutions in Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Libya, Qatar, Spain, Turkey, and  
19 the United Kingdom.  
20

21 At a regional scale, El-Kholei and Yassine (2019) examine efforts towards  
22 developing smart and sustainable cities (SSC) in the Arab region. They argue that a  
23 sustainable city is not attainable in the presence of an illiteracy and poverty that  
24 characterise different parts of the Arab world. At a city scale, Yaprak Öz and Demirhan  
25 (2019) propose a framework to act as a strategic decision support mechanism for  
26 effective urban service design. Their work calls for the need for a shared understanding  
27 and appreciation of what a service is and what constitutes it among service providers  
28 and consumers.  
29

30 Quality of Life (UOL) and Quality of Urban Life (QUOL) appear to characterise  
31 urban performance discourse in two contributions. At an urban setting scale, MacLean  
32 and Salama (2019) raise questions about the quality of life (QOL) of residents and the  
33 liveability of their environments in non-Western contexts. They argue that the  
34 preponderance of existing empirical studies and measurement frameworks have been  
35 developed based on Western standards. They propose a multi-dimensional, context  
36 specific model based on the premise that QOUL studies should balance universal values  
37 and context-specificities. It is this context specificity that emerges in the study of Gür,  
38 Taneli, and Dostoğlu (2019), which is also conducted at an urban setting scale. They  
39 develop a conceptual model and validate it through its implementation in the context of  
40 Doğanbey in Bursa.  
41

42 In two very different contexts; Ankara, Turkey and Basra, Iraq, walkability,  
43 including attitudes towards walking, and walking behaviour, is the focus of two  
44 contributions. The work of Seles and Afacan (2019) calls for expanding the Theory of  
45 Planned Behaviour (TPB) by including attributes that pertain to a healthy urban  
46 performance of residential neighbourhoods as an additional predictor for walking  
47 behaviour. Al-Saraify and Grierson (2019) place emphasis on walking to occupational  
48 activities by advocating the need for a reliable subjective instrument to gather  
49 information on walking to occupational activities on the neighbourhood scale. NWOAQ,  
50 Neighbourhood Walking to Occupational Activities Questionnaire, was developed as a  
51 data collection mechanism backed by indicators stemming from the Theory of Planned  
52 Behaviour (TPB).  
53

54 The work of van Riel and Salama (2019) unveils various aspects of belonging  
55 and exclusion in the context of Accra, Ghana, with a focus on its youth. It examines  
56 young people's 'lived' experience of urban spaces through the use of auto-photography  
57 as an appropriate method relevant to the investigation. Their work represents a call for  
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4 urban professionals and decision makers to produce inclusive urban environments that  
5 cater for all while allowing for differences and belonging to co-exist. In a contrasting  
6 environment, Madrazo (2019) examines three neighbourhoods in Barcelona. His work  
7 conveys that the residents of these neighbourhoods in the city of Barcelona–Trinitat  
8 Nova, Plus Ultra and Vallcarca– have struggled against the threat of radical urban  
9 renewals planned by the municipal authorities for decades. Madrazo call for the need  
10 to develop skills and methods to enable them to form part of the open and  
11 participatory planning systems.  
12

13 Focusing on the scale of urban open spaces, two contributions advocate  
14 structured methods to gather qualitative information through various assessment  
15 approaches. The work of Remali and Abudib (2019) cross-examines the characteristics  
16 of six different neighbourhoods within the city of Tripoli and establishes a profile for  
17 each, focusing on the way in which key principles and values are perceived. They call  
18 for assessing existing residential districts as a step towards effective regeneration of  
19 existing neighbourhoods or creating new ones. Likewise, Gharib (2019) scrutinises the  
20 qualities of urban open spaces of two traditional markets in Qatar by conducting  
21 behavioural mapping and impressionistic assessment procedures.  
22

23 By and large, the narrative successfully addresses key aspects of urban  
24 performance, but the challenge remains; the clarity in articulating the associations –  
25 how the qualities underlying one of the three pillars -- the conceived (imagined), the  
26 perceived (measured) and the lived (experienced) – have implications on the other  
27 two. Notably, the three pillars function as parts of a cycle. The results of the study into  
28 the lived (individual experiences of the environment) and the perceived (networks and  
29 flows) should feedback into the conceived (policies, strategies, and visions) again. In  
30 many cases, the lived and the perceived are an outcome of a non-responsive conceived,  
31 and the cycle will do well when implications are better interconnected.  
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## 36 **5. The open-ended narrative (2020-onward)**

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39 The open-ended narrative represents concepts, issues, and themes generated within  
40 the contributions published in this edition of Open House International. Reflections are  
41 developed to capture the salient features of each contribution in terms of themes or  
42 approaches to investigation.  
43

44 Three contributions are situated within the Chinese context. On the one hand,  
45 Wiedmann and Wang (2020) argue for the possibility of achieving integrated urbanism  
46 in Chinese edge cities, which are produced in a very limited timespan. They explore one  
47 of the Beijing's biggest edge cities: the Yizhuang Development Area. Adopting an  
48 integrated approach to investigation, their work amalgamates various mapping efforts  
49 and field studies. They call for a better integration of urban development through  
50 urban design initiatives that enable enhanced urban qualities and achieve diversity and  
51 social interaction as key characteristics of contemporary urban life. On the other hand,  
52 Zhoua et al., (2020) advocates sustainable renewal of industrial land as part of the  
53 master planning process while arguing for the need to consider not only the site  
54 determinants but also the larger scale of township planning. Espousing a research-  
55 based practice approach through the case of Lijia in Changzhou City, Zhoua et al.,  
56 develop and implement an assessment framework that embeds an econometric model,  
57 which includes economic, social and ecological aspects and is coupled with field  
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4 observations and in-depth interviews. Along the same approach of research-based  
5 practice, the work Tang et al., (2020) engages with the notion of memory place-making.  
6 They develop an understanding of the relationship between memory and place and  
7 utilise this into a memory design project for a site at Nanjing Yangtze River Bridge. In  
8 essence, the work develops a new approach to urban public spaces, in which the notion  
9 of memory is materialised in its fullest sense; debating the way in which memory  
10 communicates content and information through the interplay between body and mind  
11 of participants and the physical environment.  
12

13 The narrative expands to address various aspects of academic research and  
14 design thinking. On the one hand, Hurol (2020) presents a critical discussion related to  
15 the ontological approach to architectural research, which addresses the reductionist  
16 approach and the split of technical issues from those of arts and humanities. Hurol  
17 discusses the main characteristics of the ontological approach to architectural research  
18 by explaining its possibilities in relation to the contents, methodologies and subject  
19 position in research. This work was interrogated in a PhD course through which it  
20 reveals the impact of the spontaneous ideology of architecture for such a split. On the  
21 one hand, at the level of design thinking, Tünger and Taşlı Pektaş (2020) presents a  
22 study that compares cognitive behaviours of designers in geometry based  
23 environment, represented by Rhinoceros, and parametric design environment,  
24 represented by Grasshopper environments. Retrospective protocol analysis method is  
25 utilised following a content oriented approach. The study reveals that participants  
26 performed in considerably different ways within these two environments. The two  
27 environments different advantages and disadvantages during the design process.  
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30 Examining the tectonic effects of openings as “built-things”, Ghelichkhani  
31 (2020), reflects on the Çavuşoğlu House in Cyprus taken as a phenomenological case-  
32 study to explain the immediate experiences of dwellers of the “poiesis” and “poetic  
33 revealing” through the various openings in this contemporary piece of architecture.  
34 The openings in this building are studied according to their tectonic affects, whether  
35 poetic, due to change/time, and due to dominance. Relevant to the psychology of place,  
36 the study is undertaken by observing the openings in their places, by interviewing the  
37 users and architects, and by sketching the tectonic qualities of these openings. While  
38 Ghelichkhani’s study is undertaken at the building scale, El-Ashmouni and Salama  
39 (2020) examine the evolutionary aspects of contemporary architecture of Cairo over  
40 the past three decades. They debate the plurality of “isms” within the architectural  
41 discourses by adopting three lines of inquiry: chronological, interventional, and  
42 representational while underpinned by the discourses of decolonization and  
43 cosmopolitanism. The critical analysis conveys that both constructs originate from the  
44 contradiction resulted from modernisation and the development of the secular  
45 everyday life and that this will continue to affect Cairene architecture while generating  
46 various architectural possibilities.  
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50 In the context of Amman, Jordan, Al-Betawi et al., (2020) examine  
51 transformations in apartment buildings as a reflection of social change. The  
52 investigation involves 170 apartment buildings and is based on design attributes and  
53 lifestyles between 1970-2020. Their work demonstrates that Jordanian people became  
54 more open to social life within the public realm while preferring more privacy for their  
55 family life. In a different context, El-Kholei (2020) presents a critique of approaches to  
56 participatory planning by questioning the differences between residents’ perception of  
57 their environment and findings based on fieldwork including aspects relevant to  
58 residents’ awareness and their ability to make meaningful recommendations. Taking  
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4 the context of Askar in Bahrain El-Kholei argues that residents' opinion might be useful  
5 in addressing problems, but that cannot be directly used for decision making.

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

25  
26 The twelve contributions generate a narrative that further validates the  
27 pluralistic dimension of built environment research. It is clearly evident that the open-  
28 ended narrative generates various possibilities for future themes and approaches to  
29 investigation that range from conceptual arguments and critical analysis to  
30 experimentation and empirical testing, across a wide array of contexts.

## 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 **6. Outlook: Prospects for polyphonic narrative for built environment** 38 **research**

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

- 52 • Leitmotif narratives  
53 *Design studio pedagogy; sustainable environments for tourism; responsive*  
54 *learning environments; affordable housing environments; diversity in urban*  
55 *environments; and architecture and urbanism in globalised environments*
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- 5 • Contextual/Conceptual narratives
- 6 *Architecture and urbanism in the global south; tripartite urban performance and*
- 7 *transformation*
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- 10 • The open-ended narrative
- 11 *Urbanism in edge cities; sustainable urban renewal of industrial areas; place*
- 12 *making and memory; ontological approaches to academic research; tectonic*
- 13 *realities and spatial experiences; social constructs and architectural trends;*
- 14 *physical transformations as indicators for social change; relevance of community*
- 15 *and participatory design and planning practices; philosophies and theories*
- 16 *influencing architecture and urbanism*
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19 The articulation of the preceding narratives stimulates a sustained quest for re-  
 20 thinking concepts, notions, and issues of concerns while invigorating research  
 21 prospects endeavours and setting the future directions of Open House International.  
 22 While these narratives are presented as examples that delineate the scope and focus as  
 23 well as the plurality and diversity of built environment research, it should not be seen  
 24 as exclusive. Collectively the polyphonic narratives should be viewed as a platform for  
 25 seeds of ideas that exemplify the potential to trigger improvement and enhancement of  
 26 built environment research.  
 27

28 Open House International (OHI) will continue to be an interdisciplinary journal  
 29 for built environment research speaking to the disciplines and areas of interest in  
 30 architecture, building technology, housing, urban design and planning. The preceding  
 31 narratives are expanded to reflect the new staging of OHI aim of establishing effective  
 32 links between theory and design and education and practice in these fields while  
 33 emphasis on international collaboration and global south/global north dialectics. The  
 34 aim is envisaged through two overarching objectives:  
 35

- 36 • Promote research and practice towards addressing the full spectrum of sustainable
- 37 development and whenever possible relate to the United Nations Sustainable
- 38 Development Goals (UN SDGs).
- 39 • Improve the quality of built environment through encouraging greater sharing of
- 40 decision making by ordinary people. It also aims at developing the necessary
- 41 institutional frameworks, which will support the local initiatives of parties in the
- 42 housing and place production processes.
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46 Stemming from the three categories of polyphonic narratives presented in this  
 47 article, and materialising OHI objectives, two areas representing important lines of  
 48 inquiry are envisaged towards the future:  
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- 50 • *Socially and Culturally Sustainable Architecture and Urbanism:*
- 51 This area involves a range of topics that include action planning; affordable homes;
- 52 building and urban design; building design & planning for social sustainability;
- 53 culture and built form; gender issues in design; habitat agenda; housing planning
- 54 and production; slum improvement and redevelopment; socio-spatial justice; user
- 55 participation; vernacular architecture and self-built housing development.
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- *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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Figure 2. Open House International – covers of special issues identified to analyse the contextual/conceptual narratives (Courtesy of Emerald Publishing).

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