Vision for Scotland 2050
Welcome to autumn 2018’s Scottish Planner. With the planning system in Scotland still in a state of flux as the Planning Bill undergoes detailed scrutiny by the Scottish Parliament, here at RTPI Scotland we are all too aware that members throughout the country are getting on and working hard to see development delivered, precious environments protected, and Scotland’s places enhanced for everyone. With review of the National Planning Framework due to start next year, the time is ripe to lift our eyes from procedure to the opportunities that planning offers to help build a better and more successful country. In this issue we are launching ‘Scotland 2050’ – a debate we want to see happen in the profession about the contribution that planning and planners can make to shaping Scotland by NPF4’s end date. To get things going we have asked three planners – all professionals with a different perspective – to share their vision for how our nation will look in 30 years’ time.

Our lead article from John Lord and Nick Wright provides vital context for this, providing a snapshot of the research they have completed for the Scottish Government looking at how we can begin to measure planning outcomes.

Finally, the RTPI is your Institute, and we want to see as many members as possible involved in projects like Scotland 2050, as well as the range of chapter and national events that happen across the country. In light of the new data protection rules the way RTPI Scotland shares news with you by email has changed. If you want to continue to hear from us by email – including about Chapter events – please make sure to log in to the ‘My RTPI’ section of the RTPI website, check we have the right email address for you, and tick the appropriate boxes.

— Kate Houghton, Co-Editor
SCOTLAND: Reconciling Zeitgeist to Genius loci

Prof Brian M Evans
Professor of Urbanism and Landscape at the Glasgow School of Art and Director of the Glasgow Urban Laboratory

At the turn of the 21st century, Frank Arneil Walker wrote that designing for place demands an ability to reconcile the genius loci (the spirit of place) with the zeitgeist (the spirit of the times) – a simple, elegant concept to grasp, if a deal harder to describe, teach and practice.

There is a continuous and passionate discussion about the genius loci in Scotland but, significantly, there is also an established consensus that the spirit of place is somehow environmental, cultural and spiritual and expressed in cultural inheritance, the built heritage and the natural environment. The zeitgeist, however, is an altogether more complex challenge in the febrile environment that presently exists where Brexit runs the risk of creating a stultifying stasis throughout the UK.

We must not let this come about, for beyond Brexit and our own ‘Constitutional Question’, lurk a basket of international forces that we are all aware of and that may combine to be toxic or benign to society and community.

Global trends that drive the Zeitgeist: Recent research undertaken by the Glasgow Urban Laboratory (GUL) for the United Nations identified six trends that affect all the countries in the area of the UNECE (the world from Vancouver to Vladivostok): Ageing, Low Fertility, Migration, Climate Change (in itself a polyvalent challenge), Automation and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

This cocktail of trends are the backbeat to our zeitgeist. They are international forces of globalisation and, it seems, we are powerless to stop them. Furthermore they interact and this interaction can, without intervention, become toxic for communities. Fortunately there are also opportunities and, with enlightened leadership and pragmatic management, the combined effects can be made more benign if not beneficial. This however requires vision, clarity, skill, transparency and a degree of political courage to face down the hypocrisy and dissimulation pedaled by many commentators. (Figure 1: The cocktail of international trends).

Urban Concentration:
The combination of the jet age and the net age has compounded urban concentration. The predicted death of distance whereby the entrepreneurial class takes off to the islands to telework over fibre broadband has proved to be a myth. Certainly there are those who desire remoteness, but they are comprehensively outnumbered by those who seek the face-to-face buzz of the city. Recent GUL research for Burness Paull has shown that the centripetal effect of urban concentration is present in Scotland’s cities as it is in cities across the global north.

To explain the phenomenon of urban concentration, the UN has devised the concept of the supercity – clusters of competitive cities that combine to compete with the megacities of the global east and south. The GUL research raises the question as to whether the UK is a such a supercity (Figure 2: Supercity UK).

A change in the urban paradigm:
Over the last two decades, there has been a paradigm shift from the industrial city to the knowledge city where knowledge is the principal means of production that requires no spatial requirement beyond proximity. Scotland should consider moving from the term post-industrial, as applied to Glasgow and Dundee, and start thinking in terms of proto-knowledge cities instead. Glasgow’s new knowledge geography is remarkable, Dundee is on the road towards a similar transition, Edinburgh’s is well-advanced (it had the advantageous starting point of capital city status and clusters of government and national institutions) and Aberdeen could join the club if it can overcome its own polarities (Figure 3: the industrial-knowledge paradigm shift).

City-regions are important:
The GUL research has identified that nearly 60% of the KIBS (knowledge intensive business services) jobs in Scotland are located in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen. Add to these the three city regions and the figure rises to over 80%. Our knowledge future is urban and regional.

Management of these trends in the zeitgeist is necessary as is recognition of the consequences described above, but this is not sufficient. To combine the effects of these
a lottery where projects and infrastructure are delivered without the benefit of a spatial rationale. Regional (strategic) planning therefore remains a necessary balance in the mediation between the zeitgeist and the genius loci. The Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government is alert to these interactions and challenges that can combine to be toxic or benign for communities and citizens. The trends of the zeitgeist impact on our national (UK and Scotland) and local institutions from the NHS to HMRC that were born of 20th century issues and have, by and large, 20th century aims and organisational structures. We now need to design responses that are appropriate to Scotland; we need to think outside of Scotland; and, we need to develop an explicit consensus about what is important. Therefore we must exhort our politicians to continue their cross-party efforts to this end in the safeguarding of Scotland’s genius loci.

We must manage these international trends carefully and design intelligent responses or we will face attrition of what we hold dear. This then is the job of government, national and local, and it is the job of society at large and all of us as professionals.

This text is a synopsis of a talk given to the Place Standard Alliance on 7 June 2018. The analysis supporting this narrative can be accessed online at RADAR, the Glasgow School of Art’s research repository.

References

2. The Glasgow Urban Laboratory is a research unit of the Mackintosh School of Architecture The Glasgow School of Art with partners Glasgow City, the United Nations and the Academy of Urbanism.
4. Figures 1 – 4 are reproduced from Scotland’s Urban Age: Towards a New Urban Agenda for Scotland, Evans, B. Lord, J. Robertson, M., The Glasgow Urban Laboratory and Burness Paull. Figure 5, courtesy of UN-Habitat, Nairobi, 2018
6. Scotland’s Urban Age: Towards a New Urban Agenda for Scotland, Evans, B. Lord, J. Robertson, M., The Glasgow Urban Laboratory and Burness Paull, 2018

Figure 2: Supercity UK

Figure 3: the industrial-knowledge paradigm shift

Figure 4: Linkage of National Urban Policy to SDG Targets: Source UN-Habitat