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Editorial

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

Article:

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



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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.¹

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)² 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).³

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).⁴

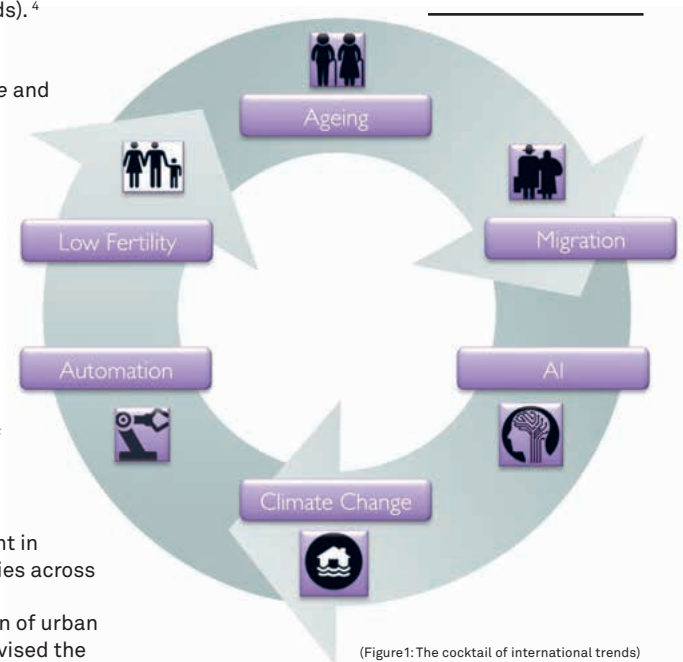
Urban Concentration:

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.⁵ 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.⁶

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).⁷

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



(Figure 1: The cocktail of international trends)

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

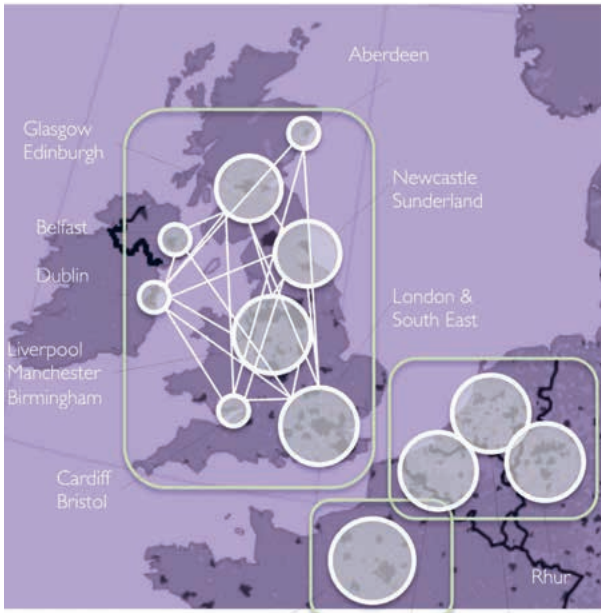


Figure 2: Superpercity UK

forces in a benign manner requires vision, leadership and a designed response. Scotland's national objectives, performance frameworks and indicators together with national outcomes are all very important. It is important to measure things. It will take consensus-building to bring these about and campaigns like 'Scotland is Now' are important in this respect. But it follows from this narrative that Scotland needs a designed response, a plan, and it is fortunate that the Scottish Government is now embarking on NPF4. The Scottish Government is to be complimented in its early adoption of the UN's 17 Strategic Development Goals (SDGs) formulated after the Paris Agreement of 2015. Recent research by UN-Habitat has highlighted how national urban policy can be dovetailed with the SDG targets and NPF4 should grasp this opportunity to put Scotland at the forefront of national planning policy. (Figure 4: Linkage of National Urban Policy to SDG Targets: Source UN-Habitat)

The recent drive to community activation and engagement is welcome – essential in fact. The roll out of charrette-based activity has been beneficial in assisting communities (and those who serve them) to understand and manage assets and to facilitate strategic change. But the gulf between community activity and national planning is too great, even for a small country like Scotland, especially one with an extensive and disparate geography. There needs to be a regional mechanism of spatial mediation in the provision and delivery of infrastructure between community and nation. In this respect, the city-region deals are an imaginative and welcome step in regional delivery, but without strategic spatial plans, they run the risk of becoming something of

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.⁸

References

- ¹Grasping the Thistle, Walker, F.A. in Urban Identity: Learning from Place II, Evans, B.M. Macdonald, F. and Rudlin, D. (editors), Routledge 2011
- ²The 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 Acedemy of Urbanism.
- ³UNECE – United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. Towards a city-focused people-centred and integrated approach to the new urban agenda, Evans et al, UN-Habitat, 2016. The Regional Report on the UNECE prepared for Habitat III, 2016.
- ⁴Figures 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
- ⁵The Death of Distance: How the Communications Revolution Is Changing Our Lives, Cairncross, F., The Economist, 1997.
- ⁶Scotland's Urban Age: Towards a New Urban Agenda for Scotland, Evans, B. Lord, J. Robertson, M., The Glasgow Urban Laboratory and Burness Paull, 2018
- ⁷Evans et al UNECE & Burness Paull Op cit.
- ⁸[https:// http://radar.gsa.ac.uk/profile/496](https://http://radar.gsa.ac.uk/profile/496)

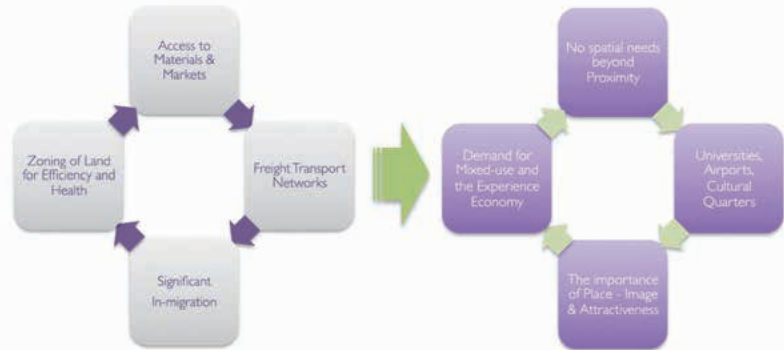


Figure 3: the industrial-knowledge paradigm shift



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