

Answering questions and questioning answers

To clarify and expand upon the above editorial title, let me first cite a sentence from my editorial in *BEPAM* 7.2: “One task that I have found interesting as an Editor, is to identify and map the linkages between the themes covered in an issue (and indeed, at times, across issues), so as to demonstrate potential synergies and even trigger cross-cutting research questions that may inspire subsequent R&D exercises and useful findings”. Moving on from that observation in Issue 7.2: the initial answers to any research questions would of course need testing and validation; and in the special cases of the aforementioned wider theme-straddling questions, the answers may need to be “questioned” even more rigorously, i.e. critiqued from all possible perspectives, “double-tested” and refined if needed, before any validation.

Stepping back to the initial stages of interdisciplinary or inter-theme research, it would help avoid too many “difficult to answer” follow-up questions downstream, if the initial answers are framed and contextualised with greater care, for example, by considering all potentially influential variables in each of the relevant theme domains. In particular, extending the “research space” to other themes may “awake” hitherto dormant variables that would have remained “inactive” in their own original space. For example, project performance criteria in design-bid-build projects would need to be adjusted and KPIs recalibrated, before extending to longer term finance-design-build-operate projects or design-bid-build-operate projects.

After all, while knowledge is expected to grow continuously by “answering new questions” periodically, we expect that each cycle should enable a significant step upward, if not “a leap” forward, although new questions would still arise after awhile, based on new technologies, tools and socio-economic priorities. However, what is advocated here is about questioning and then, if feasible, extending the applicability of knowledge to other parallel or related theme or sub-theme domains, e.g. from buildability criteria (and/or good practices) in construction “project management” to maintainability criteria (and/or good practices) in built “asset management”. In the context of the editorial title above, such “broader questions” may lead to modifications of the “answers” to the original “narrower” questions that led to developing the original “buildability” knowledge base – so as to resolve conflicts with the “maintainability” knowledge base, e.g. so as to generate an integrated set of performance criteria and best practices for the whole life cycle from planning, design and construction to operation, maintenance and beyond. Indeed this life-cycle overview “is what *BEPAM* is about”.

Applying the above observations to papers in the current issue of *BEPAM*, we are pleased to present a mix of papers that include not only some that dig deeper into particular hot topics, but also others that draw upon and aim to synergise relevant aspects of hitherto stand-alone themes, e.g. straddling “lean principles & practices” and “value engineering” in one paper; and typical “critical success factors” and “ex-post performance indicators” in the context of public private partnership (PPP) projects, in another paper. Moreover, as in previous issues, I juxtaposed papers on potentially related themes in order to inspire any potentially cross-cutting innovative ideas or research questions. Therefore, it is not coincidental that papers on carbon critical and green buildings are juxtaposed, as are those on green buildings and sustainable transportation, transportation and water pipeline infrastructure, value engineering and cost performance, performance and critical success factors.

I hereby invite, or to be more provocative, I challenge, readers to identify other potential connections and synergistic knowledge-building research questions for future attention, by scanning at least the abstracts of the papers in this issue with an open mind and constructively “disruptive” mindset.



Given my above challenge, breaking with tradition, I will avoid any possible distortion or shift of focus or emphases of the authors' intent, by not attempting to paraphrase the abstracts nor critique the papers in this issue which have already undergone rigorous review anyway. If you are not looking at a hard copy, please be reminded that the abstracts can be viewed freely online through the "Table of Contents of Issues" page at: www.emeraldinsight.com/loi/bepam

Apart from the various themes explored in this issue, the knowledge contributions draw on a multiplicity of sources, such as different countries and author backgrounds disciplines. The spectrum of authors ranges from the USA, UK, UAE Dubai, Sri Lanka and Malaysia to Australia. Although Africa and South America are not represented in this current issue, a paper from Nigeria is in the pipeline for a forthcoming issue. It should also be mentioned that some of the papers in this issue were originally submitted for the special issue on "Emerging issues in the built environment sustainability agenda" that was very recently published as *BEPAM* 7.4. That special issue attracted many good submissions, so we took over the subsequently accepted papers from the Lead Guest Editor Dr Thanuja Ramachandra into a regular issue.

In the context of special issues and in terms of diversity, we have an interesting range of three special issues in the pipeline, with papers currently being submitted for the following three:

- (1) "Service innovation through linking design, construction and asset management", the Guest Editors being Hedley Smyth, Grant Mills and Kamran Razmdoost from University College London, UK;
- (2) "Rethinking construction productivity theory and practice", the Guest Editor being Wei Pan from The University of Hong Kong; and
- (3) "Built environment sustainability: what's new and what's next?", the Guest Editors being Sachie Gunatilake and Kanchana Perera from The University of Moratuwa.

Another one being planned with guest editors, from Sri Lanka, the UK and USA will be on a theme of PPPs, exploring topical sub-themes of potential, prospects, pitfalls and precautions in upcoming PPPs.

So watch this space [...]

Meanwhile, for those interested in journal performance statistics, I am grateful for the following brief summary extracted by our Publishing Editor, Aidan Morrison, so that we may track our progress periodically: "From a metric perspective, *BEPAM* continues to go from strength to strength. We have built on 2016's impressive 40% increase in downloads and continue to improve, with an average monthly increase of 25% in 2017. Published papers and citations also continue to grow. The 2016 Journal Citation Report has shown *BEPAM* to have 34% more articles and 76% more citations since the 2015 window". These numbers confirm our rapidly increasing impact, as well as that we are well on track to apply for the next step upwards from our listing in the Emerging Source Citation Index, i.e. to the Clarivate's Sciences Citation Index. We invite you to join us in this journey, in publishing and deliberating on high-calibre cutting-edge research and breakthrough best practices, addressing cross-cutting issues in, and interfaces between project management and asset management of building and civil engineering infrastructure.

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