

Editorial

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In the first paper, Mugisha (2013a) utilizes Markov processes to forecast service coverage and non-revenue water use. The paper uses empirical data on service coverage and billing efficiency from 2003–2010 from the main water utility in Uganda, National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC). Markov processes were used to enhance the understanding and visualisation of explanatory factors underlying past trends, forming a basis for forecasting. The results show that although coverage and billing policies may be adequate for operational purposes, utility policies may lead to a ‘less-than expected’ rate of exponential growth in the long-run, if attention is not given to uncertainties such as the socio-economic status of users, population growth, performance focus and resource allocation efficiencies.

In the second paper, Mugisha (2013b) pinpoints another frequently forgotten but important issue – the impact on implied technical efficiencies of decision making units (DMUs) involved in the goal-setting process. The case study is again the main water utility in Uganda, NWSC, where the data envelopment analysis technique is used to derive targets and technical efficiencies of 19 sub-utilities. These targets are compared with negotiated targets and technical efficiencies are similarly contrasted. The results show that even when goal setting is participatory, with an accepted level of difficulty it may not necessarily guarantee improved efficiency in the DMUs. Both papers provide tools for the improved management of utilities.

In the third paper, Younger (2013) discusses the development of road infrastructure in Indonesia (the world’s tenth largest economy), spanning the early days before independence to recent times and showing the emphasis in the different periods. The 1997/1998 Asian economic crisis not only slowed down development, but later manifested many problems related to skills development, shortage of quality route length and proper accountability. Despite improved governance through democracy and regionalization in 2004/2005 and increased investments, operational issues have emerged, including poor maintenance, absence of a sound road construction industry, lack of skills and equipment and poor work supervision. The paper highlights the importance of a well-managed road sector in propelling economic development in developing and emerging nations.

In the fourth paper, Gatheral (2013) discusses the winner of the ICE North-West Region Small Project of the Year Award, a project to redesign and reconstruct a bridge in Burscough in South Lancashire, UK. The original design was a single span,

brick arch structure, however, during the extreme winter of 2009–2010 defects appeared in the form of mortar loss and cracks running through the brickwork. Gatheral explains how early engagement with the contractor gave confidence in predicted out-turn costs by the use of the chosen system. The most effective option identified was the Flexiarch mass concrete system. Long-term, whole-life maintenance issues were considered along with ecological and environmental constraints.

A paper by Wamuziri (2013) highlights the need for standardised property management information systems, incorporating stock condition surveys and planned maintenance programmes. The author uses the example of the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) and outlines the key features and the progress made by housing associations and local authorities in upgrading their properties to meet the criteria. Wamuziri notes that prior to development of the SHQS, the experience of social landlords with regard to stock condition surveys was very unsatisfactory. Recent experiences show that comprehensive surveys were actually carried out to a very high standard, incorporating operational and strategic maintenance plans to fulfill requirements of the SHQS. However, as many landlords resorted to bespoke systems, effectiveness was reduced.

The final paper (Natividade-Jesus *et al.*, 2013) explains how urban regeneration is increasingly a universal issue and a crucial factor in the new trends of urban planning and has now become part of new urban and housing policies. It involves complex multifaceted decisions related to technical requirements, safety concerns, and socio-economic, environmental, aesthetic and political impacts. Consequently, a web-based spatial decision support system is needed to support the analysis of problems and the definition of strategies and priorities of intervention. This is elaborated along with an example of regeneration from Coimbra, Portugal.

This issue closes with a review of *NEC3: A User’s Guide*. Ian Jenkinson notes that the book has been completely rewritten and addresses the whole suite of contracts, while incorporating research into the user’s needs. It is written to ensure that the engineering and construction contract is used properly in a wide variety of situations. It is comprehensive and gives an explanation of the development and use of each of the individual parts of the suite of contracts, from preparation to contract award and dispute resolution. Good practice is highlighted throughout and mini case studies are used to

illustrate points where necessary. Jenkinson recommends the book to every professional, engineer, manager and legal or financial officer as being authoritative and an easy reference guide to the NEC3 suite of contracts.

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