



URBAN STUDIES JOURNAL

Preparing a Special Issue Proposal

Introduction

Special Issues of *Urban Studies* are an integral element of the Journal. At present four or more Special Issues appear each year, covering a wide range of topics.

Special Issue publication raises two major challenges. First is the need to ensure that the quality of the published articles is at least equal to that of articles published in ordinary issues of the Journal. Second, given that the Journal is published monthly and that each Special Issue will have been allocated to a particular month in advance, Guest Editors and contributors need to abide by the strict publishing deadlines imposed by the production schedule.

A Special Issue is expected to comprise the following components:

- An introduction providing an outline of the Special Issue's intended overall (conceptual and empirical) contribution to urban discourse and the specific contributions of its constituent papers (3,000 to 5,000 words).
- A Debates Paper that actively engages with the ongoing urban discourse around the specific concepts, trends and urban processes addressed in the Special issue. It is strongly encouraged that the paper establishes connections with the contributions in the Special Issue, such as offering significant new insights or syntheses that serve to provide the rationale for the Special issue and its intended emphasis and approach (8,000 to 10,000 words, please see journal guidance on [Debates papers](#)). We recommend that the Debates Paper be developed by the proposed Guest Editors as it will comprise an extension of the rationale advanced in support of the issue.
- Typically, Special Issues contain around 10 standard research articles of around 8,500 words. These papers are required to articulate their position in relation to the rationale for the issue and to assess their contribution to meeting its aims. The Journal also welcomes partial Special Issues with fewer than 10 research articles.
- One or two Critical Commentaries that reflects on the Special Issue's focus and approach and explores future research directions. Written in a less formal, potentially more polemical style, Critical Commentaries offer novel perspectives to address urban issues and questions. It is strongly encouraged that the commentary reflects upon the contribution of the Special Issue and plot further avenues through which its research theme can be advanced. (3,000-5,000 words, please see journal guidance on [Critical Commentaries](#)).

Potential Guest Editors should develop their proposal accordingly, also bearing in mind the possibility of one or more individual papers that may fail to make it through the review process.

Proposal Submission and Assessment

Informal pre-submission inquiries on whether the Journal has a potential interest in particular topic areas are welcome. Such enquiries should be emailed to the Journal administrator responsible for Special Issues, ruth.harkin@urbanstudiesjournal.com.

Formal proposals can be submitted at any time. All formal proposals should be emailed to the Journal administrator responsible for Special Issues, ruth.harkin@urbanstudiesjournal.com. It is strongly encouraged that Special Issues should have a minimum of two Guest Editors.

Guest Editors are required to use the Urban Studies Journal Special Issue Proposal Form to make a proposal submission. This form is designed to elicit information specifically used by the Journal to assess the submission. The form imposes strict word limitations on question responses. All aspects of the form must be completed and in doing so word limits must always be adhered to.

After submission, an initial check is made by the Special Issue Editor and the Editor-in-Chief to ensure that the proposal as submitted meets submission requirements and standards. Proposals not meeting requirements may be returned to Guest Editors for revision, or they may be rejected.

Special Issue proposals that do meet requirements are then assessed by a panel of Journal Editors. The rationale, coherence and innovativeness of the proposal are key criteria used by the Editors in this assessment. All included papers will also be expected make an original contribution to urban studies beyond their empirical subject-matter; descriptive local case studies are not acceptable. Strong submissions will also demonstrate a wide geographical range of contributions in the sense of proposals incorporating papers that examine how the main Special Issue themes play out across a range of countries and regions, as well as a broad geographical range of authors. The track record of Special Issue guest editors and paper authors is also considered.

Once the decision has been taken to advance a proposal to panel assessment, we will respond to proposers with a decision within six weeks. On the basis of panel assessment, the Special Issues Editor will issue a decision letter with one of four outcomes (Reject/Requires Major Revision/Requires Minor Revision/Provisional Accept) together with feedback on the proposal explaining the decision.

Following Proposal Assessment

Once a Special Issue proposal has been provisionally accepted, the designated Guest Editors will be issued with further guidance, which contains details of the administrative arrangements for progressing the Special Issue to publication, a publication timescale that includes important interim deadlines, and formatting requirements.

Prospective Guest Editors should note that they will be required to play an integral part in ensuring the quality of the Issue and thus of the articles comprising it. In particular:

- Guest Editors themselves must assess each paper and advise the author(s) on changes required before it is submitted to the Journal, to ensure that their paper is likely to come through the refereeing process successfully. Individual papers may still experience difficulty in the refereeing process, including rejection. But as the loss of several papers will undermine the viability of the Special Issue it is imperative that the Guest Editor(s) ensure as far as is possible that papers are robust pre-submission.
- Guest Editors are responsible for identifying reviewers acceptable to the Journal (active/expertise in the relevant field; absence of close links to paper authors – e.g. reviewers should not be at the same institution or have previously published with the authors) for each of the submitted papers. A minimum of 3 reviewers is required for each paper, but, as many choose to decline an invitation to review, Guest Editors should initially identify at least 6 potential reviewers per paper.
- Guest Editors are closely involved in the decision-making process following paper review. Once all the referee reports on a SI paper have been received, Guest Editors must consider the comments of the reviewers and draft a decision letter for consideration by an assigned Journal Editor, who will retain the authority to reject or modify Guest Editor decision recommendations.
- Guest Editors must ensure that, collectively, the individual papers submitted contribute to overall Special Issue coherence. Key will be ensuring that each of the papers clearly relates to the overall ambitions and purpose of the Special Issue. The introductory paper by the Guest Editors is pivotal here, providing the conceptual framework in which paper authors can position themselves. Papers must not read as separate case studies in which the connections to the ‘bigger issues’ raised in the Special Issue are left to the reader to identify.
- Guest Editors must ensure that all papers are progressed timeously, so that the final set deadline for the submission of all copy is met. This will involve being proactive in maintaining progression of the papers through the review system.
- Guest Editors must be proactive where the viability of the Special Issue is threatened by dilatory authors or by attrition of Special Issue substance through paper rejection. This will involve bringing problems to the attention of the Journal in a timely manner and discussing possible methods of resolving these problems.

Guest Editors will be required to sign an agreement document that confirms they understand and accept their responsibilities and undertake to fulfil them to the highest standards of editorial integrity.