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EDITORIAL

## Construction Economics and Building; A Rare Breed with Fine Pedigree

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It is with a mixture of excitement and trepidation that I pen this, the first Construction Economics and Building (CEB) editorial I have written since assuming the role of Editor-in-Chief of this esteemed vessel. Excitement, because it is an honour to be asked to helm it into the challenging waters of the future, trepidation, since it has been plying its trade in stormy seas for many years and is not yet clear of them.

The last 20 years have seen something of a revolution in the way academic journals are published and distributed, with the decline of the printed hard copy and the rise of e-journals. The advent of open access (OA) publications, of which CEB was a pioneer, have added multiple layers of complexity to the traditional challenges faced by long-established, print journals.

The unrestricted access to OA research articles made scholarly research more accessible and inclusive, but this egalitarian ideal had to be funded by someone, since university libraries were no longer the source of lucrative and ongoing subscription fees. There followed an inevitable transfer of publication costs to authors through article processing charges (APCs). This was accompanied by the scent of potentially easy money in the water, attracting packs of predatory journals with questionable standards, and a voracious appetite for scarce reviewers. Indeed, the sheer number of new journals muddied the waters so much that it is now something of a science to differentiate between the good, the bad and the ugly.

Within this context, CEB has remained unique in the field of construction management. Whilst it has loudly and proudly pioneered an OA model, it has charged neither readers nor authors for access to the research it contains. This bears repeating: CEB has, and always will be

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free for authors to publish and free for readers to access. Perhaps the important questions are “how and why is it free at all?”

The answers find their roots in the last years of the 20th century when leading Australian and New Zealand academics identified a need for a new journal. Conceived in an age of print-only journals to cater firstly, though not exclusively, to the academic community in the Anglophone global south it was also intended to appeal to other markets that were underserved by existing publications. Chief among these were research higher degree students, who desired timely access to an affordable publication pipeline; quality feedback leading to a publication, prior to examination of their dissertations.

Thereafter, what set CEB apart from its counterparts were the precepts that it was to be run as a not-for-profit enterprise, where its activities were underpinned by a cadre of objective, constructive and sympathetic editors, who had access to like-minded reviewers from their schools, departments, and broader networks.

Given that printing was not cheap, sponsors were sought and ultimately found in the Australasian professional bodies, namely the Australian Institute of Quantity Surveyors (AIQS) and the Australian Institute of Building (AIB), who chose to underwrite the editorial, print and distribution costs, with any shortfall being picked up by the departments and schools of construction management themselves. Their support was pivotal at that time and continues to be so to this day; it is also unwavering. So, you may ask why I feel any trepidation at all, given their ongoing support, and consequent absence of financial threat.

Academic journals have a life cycle, some longer than others, which is determined by a combination of relevance, readership, and reward. Their life mirrors that of their parent disciplines, which wax and wane according to academic whim and expedience. Whilst the discipline of construction management has arguably existed for 60 or more years, it is only in recent years that the number of associated quality academic journals has risen much above a handful. Yet now, in an age of “publish or perish” the issue of quality has never been more important, something on which CEB has never compromised.

Quality comes at a cost to editors and reviewers in terms of the time they must spend maintaining high standards. Further, providing encouragement to postgraduates who are testing the academic publishing waters for the first time requires time, patience, and restraint. Against this, any reduction in the size of issues reduces readers and consequent citations, all of which are reflected in journal rankings. This in turn can deter the authors of quality submissions, who may choose to publish in a higher ranked journal. Given that there is an expectation that published authors should also become reviewers, well... the implications are obvious.

So, whilst this editorial is, in part, a historical reflection on the genesis of CEB, it is also a cautionary reminder that, as with so much in life, you must “use it or lose it “! I believe we will never see the creation of another journal with this ethos again.

By way of reminder of the quality the CEB model has generated, this issue contains a compendium of past papers with high citation numbers, together with four new and interesting submissions that together illustrate the quality that has, and continues to be routinely delivered by its supporters, both authors and reviewers/editors.

Further, by way of encouragement, I want to reveal some exciting initiatives that may appeal to those of you who, for one reason or another, are wondering whether to engage with CEB.

- Firstly, I am conscious that both AIB and AIQS see the need for evidence-led professional practice, seeking to add value to the industry-research nexus. To this end, both institutes wish to invite an author to convert their work into an industry article, for editions of their respective professional magazines. Their intention is for authors to extend the reach of their work and answer industry’s “so what?” questions about the relevance of research to them. These articles will be quite limited in length and must therefore be value packed and persuasive. Bearing in mind that the readership includes

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thought leaders in major construction enterprises, this represents a valuable opportunity for invited authors to connect directly to potential sponsors.

- Secondly, as a recognition of the time and effort put into providing quality reviews of submitted papers, I am keen to offer a one year “Associate Editor” role to those reviewers who undertake two or more, quality reviews within a calendar year; this will be renewed in response to ongoing reviewer commitment to the journal. These roles will be a tangible and public record of contribution to CEB and should have career value in terms of workload and promotion.
- Thirdly, I am seeking expressions of interest from international academics to fulfil the role of “Regional Editor” for their geographical locale. The primary purpose of these roles would be to promote CEB in their geographic region, using their networks to highlight the advantages of publishing in this journal. These roles would also entail some initial review of submissions, to determine their suitability for forwarding to reviewers, and therefore limit “review fatigue” among our supporters and the academic community more generally.
- Lastly, CEB is exploring mechanisms to move to provide an early publication mechanism that speeds up the time to prepublication exposure (and eligibility for citation). Accordingly, for the remainder of 2023 we will be publishing an ongoing combined Issue 3 and 4, where papers will become available online (i.e. citeable) prior to formal publication.

Finally, I look forward to working with you all into the future, where CEB is an integral part of your publication strategy. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any suggestions or queries!

**Dr Graham Brewer, Editor-in-Chief**