

planning and europe: *adieu ou au revoir?* — part 2



This article draws on a thematic search of the *Planning Resource* archive conducted to establish the frequency with which articles that address European and international issues have appeared since 2003. The archive includes pieces published in *Planning* magazine and the sister publication *Regeneration & Renewal*, which some readers may recall was produced in the heady days of the ‘regeneration decade’ of the 2000s.

The review was initially undertaken as background research for a project commissioned by the RTP1 which investigated the implications of the UK’s departure from the European Union (EU) for the relationship between planning and environmental protection.¹ To get an impression of how professional attention to the world ‘beyond these shores’ has evolved over recent decades, the archive search was then extended to include material published to the end of 2021, and to explore the frequency of references to other terms related to the European and international context.

An earlier article in *Town & Country Planning*² — ‘part 1’ to this piece’s ‘part 2’ — reported on the frequency of references to the ‘EU’ and ‘European’ and reflected on the themes of the articles which contained these terms.

This second instalment reports on the prevalence of four terms — ‘international’, ‘UN’, ‘global’, and ‘Brexit’ — in the titles and/or text of articles. The numbers of articles containing references to these terms are shown in the charts in Figs 1-3.

It should be noted that the figures are not represented as a proportion of the total number of articles, but simply record the trends in the numbers of articles published which feature the key search terms in their titles or text. This is a fairly basic form of content analysis, and care is needed not to over-interpret the findings. They do, however, provide a general sense of the evolving level of professional attention directed towards the

European and international spheres over the period covered.

References to ‘international’, ‘global’, and ‘UN’

To try to get a sense of how the focus of attention paid to contexts and issues beyond the UK has evolved, the archive was searched for the terms ‘international’, ‘global’, and ‘UN’.

International is a broad term and, as defined in the *Penguin English Dictionary*, an adjective relating to something ‘affecting or involving two or more nations’, ‘known or renowned in more than one country’, and/or ‘open to all nations; not belonging to a particular country’. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that over the whole period surveyed — apart from 2011 — it is the most frequently occurring of the search terms.

The highest number of articles citing ‘international’ in their title or text occurred in 2006, with a general decline since then. There was an upturn, however, in 2016 (the year of the UK’s EU referendum) and there has been a sustained rise since 2018 — although not, as yet, to the levels seen in the mid-2000s. This contrasts with a fall in the number of references to ‘European’ since 2018 and ‘EU’ since 2019, perhaps suggesting a re-orientation of focus to the ‘wider world’ since then.

The archive was also searched for the occurrence of the term ‘global’ in the title and text of articles. This was partly to see if notions such as ‘Global Britain’ which have been promoted by some exponents of the ‘globalist’ version of ‘Brexit’ have had any resonance within planning. It was interesting that for most of the period reviewed — and pre-dating 2016 and Brexit — ‘global’ was the third most frequently occurring term, behind only ‘international’ and ‘European’. Other than in the years 2003, 2015, 2016 and 2017, it also occurred more frequently than ‘EU’. Its use has also risen slightly from 60 instances in 2020 to 63 in 2021. The findings need to be treated with some caution, however, given that the term ‘global’ is used as a qualifying adjective linked to a range of other terms and concepts.

An examination of articles published since 2018, for example, shows the association of ‘global’ with words and concepts such as ‘climate’, ‘crisis’, ‘carbon’, ‘warming’, ‘pandemic’, ‘economy’, ‘goals for

sustainable development', 'financial crisis', 'temperature', 'emissions', 'investors', 'cities', 'urbanisation', 'competitiveness', 'real estate', 'growth', 'brands', 'market', 'infrastructure', 'Planning Network', and 'population'. In fact, only one use of the Brexit-associated term 'Global Britain' was found. Given the long-standing prevalence of the term 'global', its diverse associations, and the fact that the small rise in the frequency of its recent appearances remains below the peak years between 2006 and 2009, it seems difficult to read too much into the evolution of its use since 2016, at least based on the review of articles conducted here.

The term 'UN' is the least prevalent of those reviewed. The peak year for the frequency of its appearance was 2009, a review of the articles published that year suggesting that this was due in part to the publication of the United Nations Human Settlement Programme's *Planning Sustainable Cities: Global Report on Human Settlements*,³ the climate change conference held in Copenhagen in December, and the number of articles reporting on these events.

Since that time, the number of references to the UN has been rather low, including, perhaps surprisingly, in 2015, the year of publication of UN-Habitat's *International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning*⁴ and the adoption of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* with its associated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁵; and in 2016, the year of the adoption of the UN's *New Urban Agenda*.⁶ There has, however, been a small rise in references to the UN between 2020 and 2021 from 10 to 18, although this is some way behind the levels seen in years such as 2009 (28 references).

References to 'Brexit'

To try to get a sense of how tendencies in the use of the search terms might be linked to the UK's retreat from the EU, the archive was also searched for references to 'Brexit'. The prevalence and different themes of discussion of European and EU issues in the *Planning Resource* archive since 2003 have been reviewed in 'part 1' of this article,² revealing that a range of matters relating to the European context and EU plans, policies, and programmes have been discussed. However, although the term 'Brexit', used to describe a UK exit from the EU, was apparently coined in 2012,⁷ it seems only to have made its debut in the pages of *Planning* in 2016, the year of the EU referendum (see Figs 1 and 2 on the pages 285 and 286, respectively).

Perhaps this not that surprising given the wider views in society before David Cameron's decision to

hold an 'in/out' referendum on the UK's EU membership. Monthly surveys of opinion in the UK conducted by Ipsos showed that, as late as December 2015, only 1% of those who responded felt Europe was the most important issue facing the UK,⁸ while 'data aggregated over the whole of 2014' showed that only 2% of voters overall—and even only 7% of UKIP voters—ranked the EU 'as the most important issue'.⁹ The two years when the term 'Brexit' appeared the most frequently in the archived articles were 2016 (the year of the EU referendum) and 2019, as the tortuous negotiations and parliamentary processes imposed by the decision to leave the EU reached their crescendo. The term was also second placed behind 'international' in 2016, 2017 and 2019, as shown in Fig. 1.

Since 2019, the term has generally featured less frequently, as illustrated by Fig. 2—although there was a slight rise from 2020 to 2021, perhaps a reflection of the fact that Brexit is a 'process' rather than an 'event' and issues generated by the UK's EU exit continue to require attention and generate debate.

Discussion

This article and the previous instalment have tracked the prevalence of the terms 'European', 'EU', 'international', 'global', 'UN', and 'Brexit' in the *Planning Resource* archive from 2003 to 2021 to gain a general sense of the evolving focus of professional attention directed towards the European and international spheres over the period covered. Fig. 1 shows a fluctuating picture, with 'international' being the most common term for most of the period and 'European' the second most common. The general trend of references to 'European' and 'EU' since 2016 has been downward, even if there was a rise in references to 'European' from 2017–18 and to 'EU' from 2018–19.

In 2021 the incidence of the terms 'global' and 'Brexit' was greater than that of 'European', which fell to fourth place from second in 2020, and 'EU', which remained in fifth place. The term which has risen in use the most consistently since 2018 is 'international'—although not to the levels seen in the 2000s. References to the 'UN' have also risen consistently, although they remain below their highest level, in 2009, and are still fewer in number than references to any of the other terms (including 'European' and 'EU').

Fig. 3 (on page 286) gives a general impression of the overall numbers of articles featuring all the terms in their titles or text. Caution is needed in interpreting what it shows in terms of the overall number of *articles*, as opposed to the prevalence of

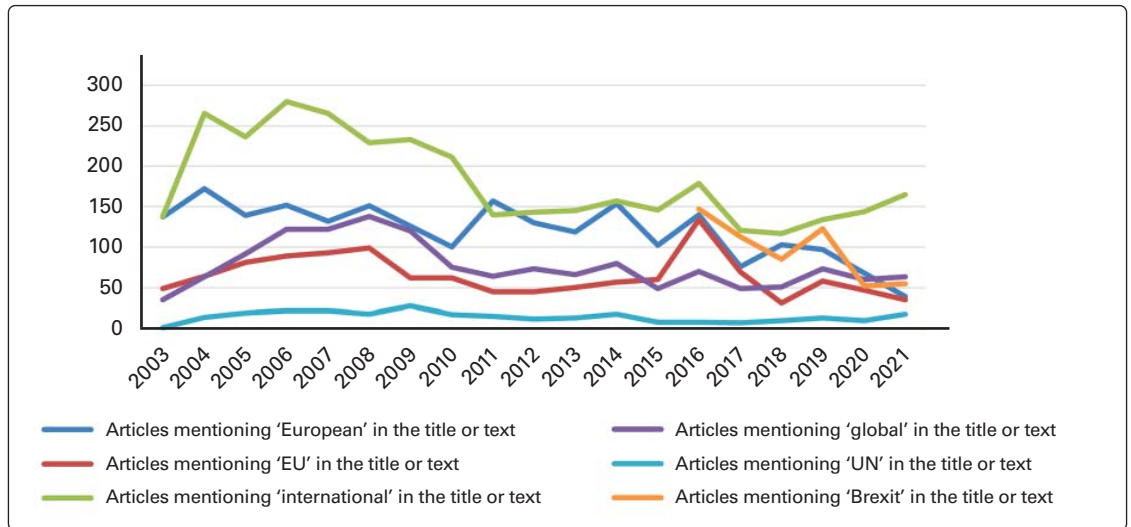


Fig. 1 References to all search terms, 2003-21

the different terms, as the terms were searched for separately and the results have not been screened for double-counting—for example, an article featuring more than one term in its text or title, say ‘EU’, ‘international’, and ‘Brexit’, would be counted three times. But with this health warning in mind, and viewing the findings of the review more *thematically*, there does seem to be less of an international flavour to articles since 2010 in comparison with the middle and later 2000s, with the notable exception of the year of the UK’s EU referendum, 2016.

Postscript 23 June 2022—Brexit, six ans déjà...

The May 2016 instalment of the predecessor column to ‘Europe Inside Out’ in *Town & Country Planning*—‘The Eurofiles’—concluded with the following reflection:

*‘An idea of Europe may be all but dead in Britain, and the uncertain prospects for the idea of planning are frequently discussed in these pages, but it is perhaps Britain’s idea of itself which is really at stake on 23 June 2016’.*¹⁰

Six years after the EU referendum, almost three years into the Johnson premiership, and nearly two-and-a-half years since the UK formally left the EU, readers may have their own thoughts on ‘Britain’s idea of itself’, and perhaps how the current version of this compares with their own ‘idea of Britain’.

What is clear is that geopolitical events since 2016—even since the publication of the ‘part 1’ of this article in the January–February issue of *Town & Country Planning*—have profoundly transformed the

European and international context. They have, for one thing, sharply exposed the (always geographically, economically, politically, environmentally, culturally and strategically questionable) idea that the UK has a binary choice to make between paying attention to, and playing consequential a role in, the affairs of its home continent, and engaging with the wider world.¹¹

‘There does seem to be less of an international flavour to articles since 2010 in comparison with the middle and later 2000s’

The years since 2016 have also starkly underlined the consequences of conflating different concepts and realities, such as ‘theoretical sovereignty’ as a form of notional ‘power over’ things (compare with ‘Take back control’), and real-world ‘influence’—forms of ‘power to’, which can effectively shape and deliver on policy agendas goals. In the past, for example, the UK influenced the development of legislation, policies and programmes in the EU, including through ‘upload Europeanisation’—the process by which domestic policy approaches come to shape EU policy development.

Two of the most significant UK contributions to the EEC/EU during its time as a member were, for example, of fundamental importance to the topical question of levelling up—the creation of a European regional policy promoted by the UK, working with

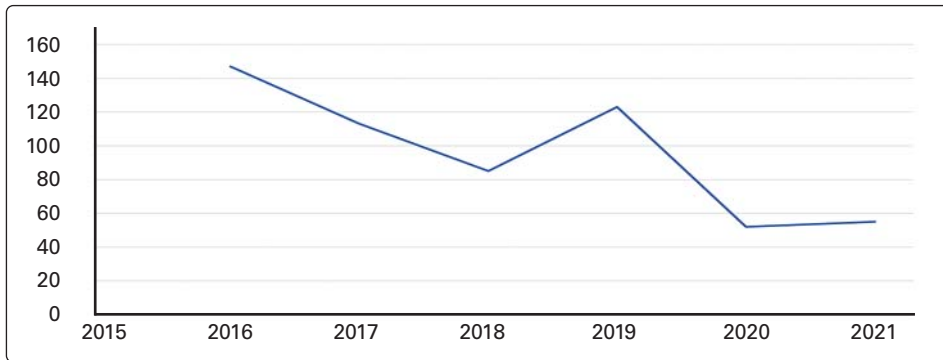


Fig. 2 Articles mentioning 'Brexit' in the title or text, 2016-22

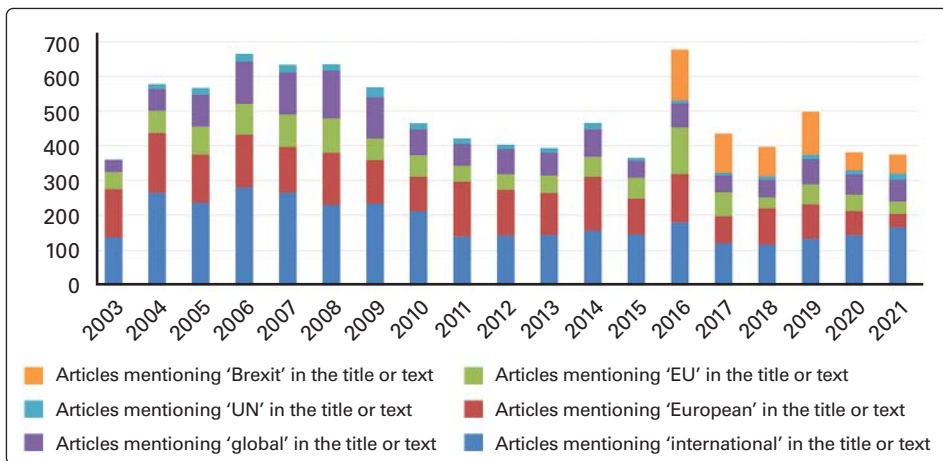


Fig. 3 Total aggregate number of references to the search terms, 2003-12

Ireland, and Italy in the 1970s; and the adoption of the legislative basis for the Single European Market in the 1980s. These enabled development in regions across the UK, notably in those which are in current terms commonly described as being 'left behind'.

Today, since the UK's EU exit, 'year by year, evidence accumulates of the [economic] damage done', and 'overall trade has lagged behind that of similar economies, and business investment has been strikingly weak'.¹² Official figures, for example, show that in the first quarter of 2022 'The UK's trade performance [...] fell to its worst level since records began'.¹³ The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) predicts that UK economic growth will stutter to a stop in 2023, with only the economy of internationally sanctioned Russia performing more weakly among the G20 nations.¹⁴ EU exit is also increasingly being recognised as an additional contributing factor to the spiking of inflation and the cost of living crisis in the UK.¹⁵

Aside from these trends, at an aggregate UK level, and particularly concerning for those involved in place-making (especially in the left-behind regions

mentioned above), are analyses since 2016¹⁶ which have pointed to the baked-in contradictions between 'Brexit' and 'levelling up'—with recent research again suggesting, for example, that owing to its industrial structure, the North East of England will be hardest hit by the UK's EU exit.¹⁷

Meanwhile, of concern to academics is the impasse on the participation of the UK in the Horizon Europe research programme, which addresses themes such as climate change, the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, and pathways to competitiveness and growth. Oddly, given its rhetoric about 'Global Britain', the government also decided to 'abruptly end one of the nation's existing (and popular) global funding schemes, the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), along with the decision not to renew a second global fund, the Newton Fund, when it ended in 2021'.¹⁸

Six years after the UK's EU referendum, the manifest and mounting contradictions and consequences of the Brexit project provide an object lesson in what the planning theorist Andreas Faludi has termed 'the poverty of territorialism'¹⁹ in an interdependent world. An *adieu* scenario in which the UK turns its

back on its immediate geographical context appears even more problematic and self-defeating than in 2016—even if some still to cling to this vision and seek other explanations for its shortcomings.²⁰

Despite the obvious challenges of pursuing this path in the current context, a scenario that acknowledges the environmental, social and economic realities of physical proximity and shared interests in global sustainability, security, and other agendas, and that seeks to foster sharing experiences and practices with others in the UK's European neighbourhood and beyond, seems more promising. With its vocation of perceiving and seeking to collaboratively address 'big picture' issues across spatial and temporal scales, and evolving UN²¹ and EU urban agendas to engage with, is it too much to hope that perhaps planning might even have a role to play here?

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Notes

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- 2 O Sykes: 'Planning and Europe: *adieu ou au revoir?*—part 1'. *Town & Country Planning*, 2022, Vol. 91, Jan.–Feb., 66–70
- 3 *Planning Sustainable Cities: Global Report on Human Settlements 2009*. United Nations Human Settlement Programme, 2009. <https://unhabitat.org/planning-sustainable-cities-global-report-on-human-settlements-2009>
- 4 *International Guidelines on Territorial Planning*. UN-Habitat, 2015. <https://unhabitat.org/international-guidelines-on-urban-and-territorial-planning>
- 5 *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. United Nations, 2015. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>
- 6 *The New Urban Agenda*. United Nations, 2016. <https://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/>
- 7 T Moseley: 'The rise of the word Brexit'. *BBC News*, 25 Dec. 2016. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-37896977
- 8 A Rasmi: 'Only 1% of Brits cared much about the EU before the 2016 Brexit vote'. *Quartz*, 10 Oct. 2019. <https://qz.com/1725402/only-5-percent-of-brits-cared-about-the-eu-before-brexit/>
- 9 M Diffley: 'Public opinion and the EU'. Ipsos blog entry, 25 Mar. 2015. www.ipsos.com/en-uk/blog-public-opinion-and-eu
- 10 O Sykes and A Schulze Bäing: 'An idea of Europe? An idea of planning?'. *Town & Country Planning*, 2016, Vol. 85, May, 208–11
- 11 As he set out the case for the UK to join the then European Economic Community (EEC) in 1962, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan pondered whether 'if we had not turned away from Europe in the Imperial heyday of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it is even possible that the slaughter of two world wars might have been avoided' — see <https://tinyurl.com/23wvnsv7>
- 12 A Beattie: 'Britain's trade relationship with the EU is needlessly dysfunctional'. *Financial Times*, 22 Jun. 2022. www.ft.com/content/795cc16a-e4a8-471c-9b8e-a4689075a96a
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- 14 B Chapman: 'UK on brink of recession and will fall behind all major economies except Russia, OECD warns'. *The Independent*, 8 Jun. 2022. www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/oecd-economy-zero-growth-forecast-g20-b2096438.html
- 15 R Partington: 'Brexit is making cost of living crisis worse, new study claims'. *The Guardian*, 22 Jun. 2022. www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jun/22/brexit-is-making-cost-of-living-crisis-worse-new-study-claims
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- 18 'UK's rupture with Horizon Europe is totally unnecessary'. Editorial. *Nature*, Vol. 606, 23 Jun. 2022, 623–24. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-022-01676-1>
- 19 A Faludi: *The Poverty of Territorialism: A Neo-Medieval View of Europe and European Planning*. Edward Elgar, 2018
- 20 The Institute for Brexit Policy has recently blamed the 'declinist mentality' of 'ruling elites in Westminster, Whitehall and the professions' (surely not planning?) for 'holding back' 'Global Britain' at a time when 'the country's international standing in terms of economic and military might and cultural influence [is] marginally higher than it was when King George I was on the throne'. The authors warning of the dangers of 'defeatist elites' include Professor Robert Tombs of the University of Cambridge, former Tory leader Sir Iain Duncan Smith, former Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, Professor Gwythian Prins of the LSE, and foreign policy experts from the King's College War Studies Department and Cambridge University' — see <https://centreforbrexipolicy.org.uk/press-releases/defeatist-elites-hold-back-global-britain/>
- 21 Such as that of the World Urban Forum, held on 26–30 Jun. 2022 in Katowice, Poland