

## **Eighteenth International Seminar on Urban Form, Montréal, Canada, 26-29 August 2011**



**Figure 1. The reception in the Canadian Centre for Architecture (photograph by Faiz Imam).**

ISUF 2011 was only the second ISUF conference to be held in North America. With the theme ‘Urban morphology and the post-carbon city’, it was held at Concordia University, on the Sir George Williams Campus, located in downtown Montréal in the vibrant Rue Sainte-Catherine. The Canadian organizers of the conference, led by Pierre Gauthier (Concordia University) and Jason Gilliland (University of Western Ontario), are to be congratulated on their organization of this remarkable and very productive event.

Like the last ISUF conference in North America (in Cincinnati in 2001), this one in Montréal was a huge success. There were 217 presentations and more than 250 participants. It is to be hoped that the strong Canadian participation in ISUF 2011 will be followed by increasing Canadian participation in ISUF more generally in the coming years, as occurred in the case of Brazilian participation after the Ouro Preto conference in 2007.

The truly international dimension of ISUF was once again evident, with participants coming from five continents. As expected the Americas (50 per cent) and Europe (28 per cent) were the most represented parts of the world. Unfortunately, African participation was small (2 per cent).

Nevertheless, the participation of the Algerian delegation, ‘representing’ the African Continent, should be highlighted. Organizers of future conferences should clearly affirm the promotion of African participation as a key challenge. A closer look at the top ten countries by the origin of those presenting papers reveals that the three most represented countries were all in the Americas (Canada, Brazil and the United States) followed in descending order by the United Kingdom, France, China, Portugal, Japan, Australia, and Sweden.

Besides providing the stage for very productive urban morphological debate, this conference offered participants the opportunity – enhanced by the field trips on the second day – to discover a fascinating city. The history of Montréal started with a small mission colony of about 50 settlers in 1642, later becoming an active commercial centre, and then an important metropolis. Industrialization and the development of the service sector were crucial for that development process. The exceptional conditions of the site (particularly Mount Royal and its surrounding forests, the St. Lawrence River, and the Lachine rapids) were decisive in the establishment of the first settlements. Throughout the years these initial



**Figure 2. The gala dinner in the Marché Bonsecours (photograph by Faiz Imam).**

urban forms expanded in the form of a powerful urban grid, parallel to the river. More recently there were major changes in the city centre, including the construction of several skyscrapers.

After the official opening of the conference, the paper sessions began with a keynote address by Jeremy Whitehand (University of Birmingham). Drawing especially on articles and editorials that he had published in *Urban Morphology* over recent years, he gave us a remarkable paper, where *the* key issues of – and *the* challenges for – urban morphology, as a field of knowledge in the contemporary world, were identified and debated. These issues were: the multidisciplinary of urban morphology; the problem of ‘anglophone squint’; Euro-American ‘myopia’; the tension between the ‘particular’ and the ‘general’; the need for comparative studies; the need for integrated approaches; the relationship between research and practice; urban morphological classics; and finally, cross-disciplinary relationships.

Over the 4 days of the conference eight broad ‘streams’ were pursued: (1) advances in theory and methods; (2) temporality (continuity and change); (3) new regional spatial dynamics; (4) form, society and technology; (5) heritage and form; (6) topical explorations; (7) form, sustainability and climatic change; and finally, (8) urban morphology, planning and urban design. Streams 7 and 8 contained the largest number of presentations. This seems to confirm that the relationships between urban morphology and both urban planning and other fields of knowledge concerning the city and

the built environment are major issues under discussion by urban morphologists – see also Oliveira (2011). At the interface between urban morphology, sustainability and climatic-change studies, explored in Stream 7, it is important to highlight the work that is being developed in the National University of Singapore, Nanjing University, and the University of Western Ontario. However, Stream 3, which focused on new spatial dynamics at the regional scale (including issues such as the dispersed city and the fragmented city) attracted less than 10 papers – a reminder, perhaps, of the need for ISUF to address all the different scales in morphological theory, research and practice.

As always, rich morphological debates were not confined to the paper sessions. Many fruitful discussions took place during the social events of the conference: the coffee breaks and lunch breaks, the reception in the Canadian Centre for Architecture (Figure 1), and the gala dinner in the remarkable building of Marché Bonsecours (Figure 2).

The conference was concluded with a plenary presentation by Michael Conzen (University of Chicago) on the future of ISUF and, indeed, of urban morphology as a field of knowledge. Some of the themes that had been introduced by Jeremy Whitehand in the first day of the conference, and debated in different parallel sessions, were revisited. The different types of study of urban form and the need for comparative analysis, such as recently proposed by Karl Kropf (2009), were



**Figure 3. The historical core of Quebec City (middle ground) and its inner fringe belt (foreground) (photograph by Susan Whitehand).**

given particular attention. A wider framework of analysis, encompassing not only different approaches but also different disciplines, was proposed.

Before returning to their countries of origin some participants took part in one of two excursions. The first took participants to Quebec City (Figure 3), the capital of the province of Quebec, founded in the seventeenth century. The second excursion was to Toronto, founded in the late-eighteenth century, and now the largest city in Canada. The remaining participants departed with the satisfaction of being part of the large ISUF family and with renewed enthusiasm for another year of morphological research. After the attractive invitation of Nicola Marzot (Technische Universiteit Delft) at the end of the conference, a

trip to Delft for ISUF 2012 should already be on the agenda of many participants.

## References

- Kropf, K. (2009) 'Aspects of urban form', *Urban Morphology* 13, 105-20.  
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## ISUF President's Report

The growing size and diversity of the International Seminar on Urban Form challenges established habits and outlook. It has seemed important to me during the last year that ISUF should examine its role among the professional fields from which it draws support and embark on initiatives that will

keep it useful in the future. Those goals suggested a two-stage approach: first, to reassess the internal functioning of the organization, and, secondly, to explore ways of increasing its relevance among fields to which it relates.

For all its growth, which stems in part from its

interdisciplinary openness, ISUF is still a remarkably volunteer-driven group. This volunteerism keeps the financial costs of participation low: conference fees, given the size of the events, are still moderate; the cost of *Urban Morphology* is astonishingly low compared with that of other high-quality, refereed, scientific journals. The true costs of our operations are measured by the time and energy enthusiastically donated by enough of our members to keep these operations, and the website, going successfully. It is for this reason that I wish in this report to express on behalf of all members our sincere thanks for the ongoing contributions made by these volunteers, and especially those being made to the current phase of reappraisal within ISUF.

In line with our perceived 'internal' and 'external' needs, two short-term task forces worked hard during 2010-11 to streamline ISUF's website and the procedures for organizing annual conferences. The Task Force to Reconstitute the Website worked to overhaul and rationalize the site's fundamental structure, regain timeliness in managing library subscriptions to the journal's online content, add cross-indexing features (prepared by Peter Larkham), and make provision for additional sections of planned content. Chaired by Jeremy Whitehand (UK), the group also included Kiril Stanilov (USA), Richard Whitehand (Sweden), and Susan Whitehand (UK). This allowed advanced expertise in website design and operation to be united with intimate knowledge of the membership/subscriber database kept by the Treasurer and the journal's editorial team. The Task Force worked with skill and dispatch, and the stability and ease of use of our website following completion of its assignment are testimony to the success of the reorganization. ISUF members owe these colleagues very warm thanks for their hard work.

The other relatively urgent matter was to formulate simple but recognized procedures for proposing and then hosting the annual conferences. When meetings were small and confined to a convenient geographical orbit, arrangements could be left to the predilections of the local organizers, especially in the days of alternating large and small gatherings. But with the growing size of the conventions, and the desire within ISUF to broaden the intercontinental and cultural mix of meetings, some organizational aspects had to become more routine and predictable. Under the leadership of Kai Gu (New Zealand), our Secretary General, the Task Force to Revamp ISUF's Conferences, on which Michael Barke (UK), Wendy McClure

(USA), and Pierre Gauthier and Jason Gilliland (Canada) also served, drew up a set of planning guidelines that identified necessary factors and procedures to be incorporated into future meetings. Since the organizers of the 2011 Montréal meetings were members of the Task Force, it was possible not only to pave the way for future conference arrangements but to implement many of the ideas in time for that event. The planning framework included ideas for the incorporation of certain kinds of workshops, maximizing scholarly exchange through the careful composition of paper sessions, and further ideas for such things as funding opportunities, prizes and awards, and session monitors. For this team's work, we in ISUF are very thankful indeed.

ISUF takes its scholarly journal very seriously, and its high professional standards and reputation for readability and diversity are now, after fifteen volumes, well established. Nevertheless, I felt it important that the journal not escape scrutiny. Therefore, the third team, the Task Force to Assess the Journal, chaired by Michaël Darin (France), with Giancarlo Cataldi (Italy), Howard Davis (USA), Teresa Marat-Mendes (Portugal) and Jeremy Whitehand (UK) as additional members, was asked to consider further ways in which the journal can extend its influence and better serve the interests of ISUF and its readers. These revolved around such ideas as regularizing the reporting of the activities of ISUF's regional affiliates (largely country-based member groups such as those that have been established for the UK, Italy, the Nordic countries, and, most recently, Portugal). Also, there is potential to increase the range of books reviewed, perhaps organize theme issues, and generally extend the international scope of coverage of work being done in different world regions on urban morphology. Many of the ideas culled by the Task Force are desirable, but their implementation will depend on the willingness of ISUF members to increase their contributions in the form of writing and submissions to the Editor. Of equal significance is the present precarious balance between the ardent goal of inclusion and the painstaking editorial effort it takes to convert many submissions from around the world into seamless English, for those authors for whom this is not their natural language. For their nuanced and sensitive work in evaluating the challenges ahead for our valued journal, ISUF owes these task force members a big vote of thanks.

Now I turn to the two remaining – and currently running – task forces, charged with preparations for two initiatives requiring quite distinct creativity.

The first is the Task Force to Create an Expository Section on ISUF's Website. The idea here is that many individuals among the various professions concerned with 'urban form', broadly conceived – not to mention the wider public – may not have an effective understanding of what 'urban morphology' as an intellectual field stands for and what it offers in the way of key concepts. It is, of course, these concepts and theories that make possible a coherent basis for analysis, both historical and prospective, so that persuasive policies for design and management can be advocated. Along with others who have shared this concern in preliminary discussions, I envisage a website section in the form of a mini 'Urban Morphopedia', whose abbreviated (and well-illustrated) encyclopedia-style entries will explain key concepts and theories used in urban morphological research. The short-term Task Force, under the chairmanship of Peter Larkham (UK), and consisting also of Marco Maretto (Italy), Fei Chen (UK), Remy Allain (France), Paul Hess (USA), and Jeremy Whitehand (UK), has been asked to consider how such an expository section should be organized, and to propose to ISUF Council an Editorial Board charged with developing this section over the next 2 or 3 years, during which time short essay entries would be commissioned, edited, and uploaded. It is hoped this task force will report its proposals to Council by September, 2012. I hereby encourage ISUF members and interested readers to contribute thoughts and ideas to this initiative over the next few months by contacting Peter Larkham ([peter.larkham@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:peter.larkham@bcu.ac.uk)). The work of this Task Force is significant for improving scientific communication both between and beyond the 'urban form' professions, and is here acknowledged with appreciation.

Finally, the Task Force on Research and Practice has a charge that is perhaps the most nebulous but potentially the most far-reaching in a practical sense: to improve communications between the researchers who study urban form systematically

and the practitioners (in both public and private sectors) who shape the design and management of urban form. The findings of the 'researchers' should be of more than theoretical interest to the 'shapers', and, conversely, the real-world experience of the latter should be equally valuable to the former. To what extent can ISUF play a role in seeking better communication? Chairing this group is Ivor Samuels (UK), assisted by Vítor Oliveira (Portugal), Art McCormack (Ireland), Sylvain Malfroy (Switzerland), Karl Kropf (UK), Giuseppe Strappa (Italy) and Amund Sinding-Larsen (Norway). Again, I encourage ISUF members and interested readers to contribute thoughts and ideas to this Task Force over the next few months by contacting Ivor Samuels ([ivor.samuels@googlemail.com](mailto:ivor.samuels@googlemail.com)). Our prospective thanks go to this team also for taking on this challenging but promising line of inquiry.

The recommendations of the first three task forces have been received by Council. Some, considering their urgency, have been fully implemented, particularly with regard to the essential functionality of the website and the planning of future meetings. Various proposals for the journal are being weighed by the Editor. Recommendations from the two remaining task forces will be due no later than early September for Council consideration. I am hopeful that this extended round of refurbishment will position ISUF to be more visible among organizations that have something to say about the form of our cities. At the same time I hope this changing ISUF remains congenial to its long-time supporters, attracts and keeps new generations of enthusiastic members, and, above all, spurs many of them to become truly active in the shaping of ISUF itself.

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## ISUF business meetings, Montréal, Canada, August 2011

Meetings of the Council and Editorial Board of ISUF took place on Thursday, 25 August 2011 in Montréal, immediately before the ISUF 2011 conference held at Concordia University. A General Meeting of ISUF took place during the conference. This report summarizes the principal matters covered in the three meetings.

### President's Report

The President, Michael Conzen, reported on the success of the conference held in 2010 in Hamburg, and thanked Jürgen Lafrenz and Alex Rostkowski for their excellent work in organizing this event. He also expressed thanks to Pierre Gauthier, Jason Gilliland and their team of helpers for organizing

an equally successful conference in Montréal.

Four task forces had been set up as a result of discussions held during and after the conference held in 2010. The first of these concerned the website. A considerable amount of work had been carried out by the newly appointed webmaster. This had included its redesign and the improvement of online access. The second Task Force had involved the production of a guide to running conferences which it is hoped will be of use to future conference organizers. The third Task Force concerned the journal *Urban Morphology*. The fourth Task Force had only recently been set up and its remit was to develop a morphopedia. When completed this would be made available on the website and would be a development of the existing *Glossary*. The aim was to communicate the concepts and core structure of urban morphology and how they fitted together.

A fifth Task Force had been set up to look at research and practice in urban morphology. The aim was to promote the concepts of urban morphology in practice.

#### **Treasurer's report**

Michael Barke reported on the sound financial position of ISUF. This had been helped by the increase in subscription rates in 2011. The number of members was increasing despite the current economic climate, and he asked members to encourage their libraries to maintain their subscriptions.

#### **Editor's report**

The Editor, Jeremy Whitehand, reported that *Urban Morphology* was now in its fifteenth year. The number of submissions continued to rise, but accepted articles were published rapidly. About one in every four full-length articles submitted was accepted for publication. There was a good flow of viewpoints but more high-quality submissions of this type would be welcome. The authorship of book reviews had further diversified, and online access for subscribing libraries was operating well.

The Editor thanked Michaël Darin and his colleagues for their Task Force report on the journal. The report stimulated discussion of a variety of recommendations. These included increasing the size of the various sections of the journal; examining further the practicalities of having thematic issues or sections of issues; and

extending further both world coverage and the links between research and practice. The Editor was keen to encourage an increase in the number of high-quality submissions.

Howard Davis and Pier Giorgio Gerosa, both having served two terms, were retiring from the Editorial Board and appreciation was expressed for their valuable contributions. They had been replaced by Piper Gaubatz and Jean-Michel Roux.

#### **Webmaster's report**

The webmaster, Richard Whitehand, submitted a report describing the major reorganization and updating of the website in the previous 8 months. This included simplification of the structure, revision of the contents of most pages, a new home page layout, improved sections on links to conferences and resources, complete overhaul of online journal access, the addition of author and keyword indexes to the journal, extension of online access to journal contents, a doubling of the number of institutions registered for online access to the journal, and the streamlining of the ISUF subscription process and institutional registration procedure for online access. There had been a 33 per cent increase in the number of visitors to the website compared with the same period in 2010.

#### **Election of Council members**

Thanks were expressed to Abdellah Abarkan, Jason Gilliland and Shigeru Satoh who had completed their terms on Council. Peter Larkham was re-elected for a 2-year term. Staël de Alvarenga Pereira Costa, Catherine Maumi and Vítor Oliveira were elected to Council for 4-year terms.

#### **Future conferences**

It was confirmed that a conference would be held in Delft, The Netherlands in October 2012 (further information available from Nicola Marzot – e-mail: N.Marzot@tudelft.nl). It would take place in the Faculty of Architecture at the Technische Universiteit Delft. The ISUF conference in 2013 would be held in Brisbane, Australia.

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## Urban Morphology in Portugal: first conference of the Portuguese Network of Urban Morphology, Porto, Portugal, 8 June 2011

The Portuguese Network of Urban Morphology (PNUM) held its first conference in June 2011. The theme was *Morfologia Urbana em Portugal: Abordagens e Perspectivas* (Urban morphology in Portugal: approaches and perspectives). The conference took place in Porto and was hosted by the Department of Geography of the University of Porto, Portugal. It was organized by the PNUM Scientific Committee, comprising Vítor Oliveira (President), Jorge Correia, Mário Fernandes, Teresa Marat-Mendes and Paulo Pinho. Ana Natálio provided technical support.

The call for papers was one of the first announcements on the new PNUM website (<http://pnum.fe.up.pt/>). It was also disseminated through various universities, institutes and planning departments. In response, some 60 abstracts of proposed papers were received and 192 people registered to attend the conference.

The papers were organized into twelve thematic sessions, each of four or five papers. The themes were: morphological approaches; planning and urban management; urban form history I; trans-disciplinary perspectives; morphological techniques; urban form history II; urban form and sustainability; morphological elements – streets/infrastructure; morphological elements – streets; metropolitan scale; morphological elements – urban fabrics; and morphological elements – squares/public spaces.

These thematic sessions were preceded by an opening session to which contributions were made by Maria F. Marinho (Director of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Porto), Mário Fernandes

and Vítor Oliveira, the President of PNUM. The closing sessions contained contributions by Helder Marques (Director of the Department of Geography of the University of Porto), Paulo Pinho, Jorge Correia and Teresa Marat-Mendes.

The conference provided a much needed focal space for debate on Portuguese urban morphology. It was appreciated by those attending – researchers, academics, students and practitioners.

The 600-800 word abstracts of the papers presented at the conference are available on the PNUM website in both Portuguese and English. The general standard of the presentations was high. While a number dealt with the conclusions of research projects, there were also presentations that included research in progress by graduate students. Both types of contribution underlined the value of a ‘debating chamber’ of this type and the Scientific Council of PNUM is convinced of the merit of organizing similar conferences in future.

At the end of the conference, it was announced that the Second PNUM Conference – with the title *Morfologia Urbana nos Países Lusófonos* (Urban morphology in Portuguese-speaking countries) – will be held in 2012, in Lisboa, Portugal. Further information will be available on the PNUM website.

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## Urban morphology and conservation – research and practice: University of Birmingham, UK, 13 September 2011

This one day workshop held in the M.R.G. Conzen Collection, University of Birmingham, was sponsored by ISUF in conjunction with the UK/Ireland Planning Research Conference, which was taking place in Birmingham from 12 to 14 September. The event reflected a growing interest and concern with the relationship between research and practice in the field of urban morphology and the opportunities and barriers that may exist to improving the exchange of knowledge between research scholars and planning and design

practitioners.

Karl Kropf (Built Form Resource Ltd, UK) started proceedings with a talk entitled ‘The pragmatics of urban morphology’, noting that the academic, ‘technical’ language used by urban morphologists was often a barrier to co-operation and suggesting that there was not necessarily anything to be lost in simplifying language and concepts in order to have a dialogue with non-specialists. Indeed it is pragmatically useful to have ‘loose’ concepts and ‘tight’ concepts in

different contexts. The diversity of sub-fields within the study of urban morphology was seen as a further problem when talking to practitioners, even though many of these provided insights and analytical tools directly related to practice. To have a meaningful impact on practice it would be necessary to establish a coherent structure of the component parts of urban morphological study – preferably based on the processes by which places are differentiated – that would be recognized and understood by non-specialists.

A more specific topic was discussed by Peter Larkham and Nick Morton (Birmingham City University). Their paper on 'Mapping conservation areas: measuring aspects of character and drawing designation boundaries' questioned how meaningful the boundary lines used in such areas actually were and examined some of the practical problems arising from boundary delimitation. They also touched upon the pragmatics of practice when they queried whether detailed, time-consuming morphological measurement produced results significantly different from those arrived at more intuitively, and noted that boundaries used in practice needed to be flexible and allow for change. They also entered a special plea for the importance of the street itself as a morphological unit as well as a social and perceptual one. Too often the street is seen as a boundary or edge.

Graham Fairclough (English Heritage) gave an intriguingly entitled talk '... have often walked down that street before' – predecessors and neighbours: landscape and cities'. He provided a wide-ranging review and critique of landscape characterization. The need for more flexible and holistic approaches was stressed – for example in relation to conservation areas, which are still mainly about façades rather than about space. Local character assessments still tend to be interpreted as statements of what 'should be' rather than as tools for the management of change and there remains a tension between 'site' based approaches to urban management and holistic landscape management, with the obsession with specific sites and monuments proving difficult to overcome. It is increasingly important to recognize the character of all areas, not just those judged to possess some 'heritage' value. Furthermore, there is some evidence of developers looking at character assessments and then approaching planners with modified proposals. More fundamentally, to be

fully meaningful, the engagement of the community in the process of landscape evaluation was necessary: the exercise could only have genuine worth with the incorporation of the community's interest, support and values.

Finally, Ivor Samuels (University of Birmingham) spoke on 'From description to prescription: the contribution that townscape and heritage surveys can make to planning practice'. A number of the practical problems in closer co-operation between academic urban morphologists and practitioners were examined; for example, area characterization studies whose categories were very general were of little use in the development control function. Detailed morphological surveys were too time consuming and elaborate. The boundary lines between disciplines were also highlighted; for example, landscape architects were comfortable with authorities such as Lynch and Cullen but much less so with authorities closer to the mainstream of urban morphology. The focus of the former on the visual townscape approach still dominated because of its relative accessibility even though it overlooks the richness and complexity of townscapes.

Despite the different perspectives of the speakers and the many problems identified, a number of generic points emerged in the course of the discussion. Somewhat uncomfortable for academic urban morphologists was the suggestion that their technical language was perceived as a significant barrier, as were the detailed 'classical' approaches that were too complex to be useful in practice. Yet, there was a clear recognition that the frequently recognized 'silo' mentality between academic disciplines was also present in practice. Intriguingly, several speakers noted the relative neglect of streets as morphological units and the continuing practice of perceiving them as convenient but not necessarily meaningful boundaries. There was general agreement, however, that if there is to be a greater level of dialogue and co-operation between academic urban morphologists and practitioners, it is vital that the common ground between the interests of the two groups be sought.

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## Eighth International Space Syntax Symposium, Santiago, Chile, 3-6 January 2012

The Eighth International Space Syntax Symposium was hosted by the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Urban Studies at Universidad Católica de Chile (UC). This bi-annual event had originally been scheduled for June 2011 but the organizers decided to delay it until January 2012 in order that those attending would be able to enjoy the long days and warm evenings of the Chilean summer: a move that was certainly appreciated by delegates from the northern hemisphere!

Space syntax symposia are widely acknowledged for advancing analytically-based built-environment research that can inform good practice in architectural and urban design. In addition the symposia have fostered a broad hinterland of theoretical, methodological and pedagogically-focused topics in the field of built-environment studies. The Santiago symposium stayed true to this tradition. Over the 4 days of the symposium 119 delegates from 24 countries representing 66 universities were able to enjoy some 90 papers, the insights of a range of keynote speakers, participate in themed workshops and discuss their research and projects with colleagues from around the world.

Before the symposium began delegates were invited to join a day-trip to the World Heritage city of Valparaíso, famous for its funicular railways and brightly painted buildings. The trip included a visit to a house of the poet Pablo Neruda. This was followed by a series of participatory space syntax workshops held in the School of Architecture at Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María.

The symposium proper got underway in the evening. Following welcome speeches from the organizer Professor Margarita Greene and other representatives of the host university, Professor Alan Penn, Dean of the Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment at UCL set the tone for the symposium by emphasizing the vitality of space syntax's contribution to the field of evidence-based built-environment research. He put this in the context of the challenges facing contemporary built environments (not least in Latin America) and the necessity of understanding more about how technology will mediate people's relationship with architecture in the future.

Professor Penn paid a personal tribute to the memory of Alasdair Turner, a key figure in the work of the space syntax community over many years, whose death from cancer in 2011 came as a shock to his colleagues, many friends and former

students. Alasdair's work was distinguished by its breadth – from theoretical innovation to computational modelling and software development, most notably the authorship of *Depthmap*. Consistent with Alasdair's wishes Professor Penn announced the launch of *Depthmap* as an open source community. Anyone interested in participating (as a user or developer) should visit <https://github.com/SpaceGroupUCL/Depthmap>.

Professor Bill Hillier got the second day of the symposium off to a start by showcasing a new method for comparing the syntactic measure of 'choice' (or 'path overlap') across urban systems of different sizes. He intrigued the symposium by taking them on a 'tour' of the world's cities and highlighting their key structural similarities and differences. In a selection from the other plenary sessions, Professor Anne Moudon (University of Washington, Seattle) addressed the ways in which the environment affects people's behaviour, Dr Sophia Psarra (UCL) explored the 'invisible architecture' of Venice, and leading Latin American urbanists and design professionals, among them Professors Alfredo Garay (Universidad de Buenos Aires) and Eduardo Rojas (Universidad Lusófona, Lisbon), reviewed the condition and future prospects of cities in this region.

In the session dedicated to Architectural Projects, Professor John Peponis (Georgia Tech, Atlanta) challenged space syntax researchers to provide architects with design principles that are directly applicable. A move to clarify the contribution of space syntax research to what is traditionally considered the 'creative' aspect of the design process emerged from this symposium as one of the 'frontiers' for subsequent exploration – it certainly provoked much debate amongst delegates.

As ever, the necessity of running parallel sessions meant it was impossible to hear all the papers on offer. Many contributions examined the relationship of syntactical morphology to other socio-economic variables, including in several cases other aspects of urban infrastructure such as public transport systems. Although the research emphasis was generally on contemporary cities, several papers were concerned to provide a historical perspective on urban growth processes. The spatial morphology of buildings was not neglected, with papers presented on galleries, schools and domestic space amongst others. There were also a number of interesting theoretical papers

and papers concerned with aspects of methodological development. The proceedings are available online from [www.sss8.cl/list-papers/](http://www.sss8.cl/list-papers/).

The Faculty of Architecture, Design and Urban Studies at UC proved to be an ideal location for an academic symposium, not least in the landscaping of its central courtyard, with the central pergola providing not only respite from the sun but a natural locus for informal meetings and the occasional rest. At the dinner that traditionally closes the

conference it was announced that the Ninth International Space Syntax Symposium would take place in Seoul, South Korea in June 2013.

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## **Exploring post-war reconstruction: meeting at the University of Westminster, London, 2 February 2012**

The University of Westminster hosted a small international gathering of academics and practitioners, convened by Dr John Bold, to explore a wide range of issues arising from European post-Second World War reconstruction. Key themes included identifying the principles underpinning post-war reconstruction; evaluating the success or failure of what was built and the decision-making processes underpinning it; and learning lessons from the case studies. In particular, to what extent are the examples informed by ideas of heritage and how far in turn do they inform our contemporary notions of heritage?

Rob Pickard started the event by reviewing the development of concepts in national and international charters and related influential documentation, with particular reference to architectural reconstruction. He highlighted significant development over time but enduring terminological confusion, some of which seemed to be related to differing national traditions of thought.

Two related papers then changed the focus to area-based reconstruction: Peter Larkham and David Adams sought means of evaluating Birmingham's widespread reconstruction, including using residents' views and exploring issues of the longevity of individual buildings and larger-scale infrastructure; while Jeremy Gould gave a detailed, and lavishly-illustrated, discussion of Plymouth as a case study of the enduring misinterpretation and under-valuing of the urban and architectural design of the 1940s and 1950s.

David Johnson gave an architectural practitioner's view of the concepts inherent in considering conservation, preservation, rebuilding, reconstruction (and others), using a wide range of examples across Europe.

Others presented a series of national case studies, prompting wide-ranging discussion about

ideas and their international transfer and the problems of international comparisons. These case studies ranged from those by Marieke Keupers (discussing Zeeland), Tanis Hinchcliffe (Normandy) and Ingrid Appelbom Karsten (Warsaw) to discussions of material sent by those unable (usually for visa reasons) to be present in person: Walter Wulf (Germany), Amra Hadzimuhamedovic (Bosnia) and Bujar Demjaha (Kosovo). The latter's examples of the adaptation of traditional house forms in varied new contexts were particularly controversial.

Participants such as Martin Cherry (formerly Head of Listing, English Heritage) and Mikhael de Thyse (Council of Europe) drew on their experiences to shape the ongoing debate. They were able to highlight that some of the issues arising from the 1940s and 1950s are still very relevant: for example the significance of local politics and individually powerful politicians in influencing decisions – including the location and form of buildings and infrastructure; and the significance of some actions to communities and identity, whether local or national (with the rebuilding of Warsaw and the Mostar bridge being interesting exemplars).

There is great enthusiasm for developing this comparison, and funding is now being sought to develop this initiative and support the emerging network. It is hoped that this network would make suggestions to relevant organizations, such as the Council of Europe, on how lessons from this experience could be translated to the sites of other conflicts, such as the former Yugoslavia.

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