

immediate problem in considering this is the number of different planning systems around the world. Those in Australasia and North America are different in fundamental ways from the discretionary system in Britain, and other European countries are different again. They can also change over time, as has been shown by the total rethink represented by the fundamental change in New Zealand in 1991, and the subsequent influence of its principles on planning law in parts of Australia. However, urban morphology can still aid the formulation of the content of policy instruments by providing the basis for a more holistic view of urban form, as opposed to specification of a limited number of parameters. In recent years, changes have been afoot in many countries around the world that would permit this. Where 'codes' are used there have been moves to ones that are explicitly 'design codes' or 'form-based codes'. In the more open, discretionary style of the British system, design guides and site specific briefs, which have a long history, have, over the past 2 decades, become increasingly clear on the desired patterns of physical form. Under all systems, master plans for major new developments are now increasingly common.

This leads to one final and very significant

contribution that urban morphology can potentially make to the planning process. Having a picture of the desired urban form is one thing: getting to it is another. One of the reasons why 'codes' have not been 'design' or 'form' based in the past is that their authors have had difficulty relating the choice of parameters of form to the achievement of the end product. Planning processes present particular challenges as they operate incrementally over long time periods and will inevitably involve negotiations between many stakeholders. What urban morphology can provide is a language that conveys the essential components of the desired form. If the appropriate language is used in both the planning instruments and negotiations then successful outcomes will be much more likely.

### Reference

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## Bridging the research-practice gap: the case of China

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In *Alnwick, Northumberland: a study in town-plan analysis*, Conzen (1960) pointed out that 'the congested townscape behind the front rows of plot dominants, though of great interest to the historical geographer, cannot claim the same intrinsic value as a physical environment for present-day living and working and is bound to disappear in time'.

These words remind us that academic research does not necessarily provide direct answers to the practical problems posed by urban development. Though a good deal of attention has been given to promoting the integration of the theory and practice of urban morphology, bridging the gap between research and practice remains an important issue (Whitehand, 2007).

To organize the variety of activities concerned with urban areas, each country has developed its own technical and political process concerned with

land-use control and design of the urban environment. These processes vary greatly not only in their intrinsic character but in the ways in which and the extent to which research on urban form is incorporated.

In China the urban planning system includes three aspects: the legal system, the administrative system and the operating system. The legal system (including laws, codes and specifications) is the foundation of the administrative and operating systems, a major characteristic being its mandatory nature. Prominent in the administrative and operating systems are the roles of planning practitioners. In these practitioner roles the distinction between research and practice is far less clear than in a number of Western countries, notably the UK. As in so many fields of knowledge in China, academics undertaking urban

morphological research are involved in practice almost continuously. For some researchers it provides their main source of research funding and income. Indeed rather than urban morphology being in an 'ivory tower' it is sublimated to the imperatives of architectural and planning practice. As a consequence in China the evidence base provided by research is relatively weak in spite of much research and practice being undertaken by the same people.

A further problem in China is the integration of the research basis of the administrative and operating systems into the legal system. Clearly such problems go well beyond what it is practicable for the ISUF Task Force on Research and Practice

to consider. However, as in most countries, in China a stronger link between urban morphological research and professional education is a major need.

## References

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## Translating 'Alnwick' into Italian: a tribute to M. R. G. Conzen

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In a recent issue of this journal, Jeremy Whitehand lucidly set out the key points that characterize urban morphology's current position as a field of research and practice (Whitehand, 2012). In his opinion, urban morphology needs to build on its interdisciplinary relationships; mitigate the effects of what he terms 'anglophone squint' and 'Euro-American myopia'; relate the particulars of individual places to a wider framework of thinking; give greater attention to comparative studies, not least cross-cultural ones; pursue more integrated approaches to urban form; and advance the relationship between research and practice. Several years ago similar priorities spurred representatives of the Conzenian geographical and Muratorian/Caniggian architectural schools to pursue experiments involving their respective methodologies. Some of us began to analyse from our own viewpoints and with our own disciplinary instruments an urban area previously studied by the other school. We focused on Alnwick and Como, the places examined in detail by M. R. G. Conzen and Gianfranco Caniggia in their classic works (Caniggia, 1963; Conzen, 1960). The results of these investigations were presented at the International Geographical Symposium in Urban Morphology in Newcastle upon Tyne in 2004 (Cataldi *et al.*, 2004; Conzen, 2004), but the papers presented were not published and they arguably merited greater discussion than they were accorded at the time.

Carrying out the investigation of Alnwick

entailed the translation into Italian of the text of Conzen's study. This took longer than anticipated. However, the work of translation enhanced our awareness of Conzen's contribution and of the need to make it known to scholars in our own country. We are grateful to the publisher, Franco Angeli for having accepted our proposal to publish the Italian edition of 'Alnwick' (Cataldi *et al.*, 2012) and for making it possible to present a preliminary view of it at the recent ISUF Conference in Delft and link it to the centenary of the birth of Saverio Muratori (1910-1973).

The tribute simultaneously to these two pioneers of urban morphology (see also Whitehand, 2012, p. 62) prompts us to speculate about how it was that at much the same time a geographer and an architect of the same generation (Conzen was born in 1907, 3 years before Muratori) should quite independently of one another publish these exceptional works. Not only were they exceptional in their originality but they had notable similarities in their principles and methods. Both were aware of the limited nature of the various disciplinary approaches to towns. Each was also conscious of the appropriateness of viewing the town as a small-scale model of the world of human activities. This awareness seems to have driven both these scholars to broaden their horizons, guided by the principle of connecting particular observations and findings to more general principles (Conzen, 1960, pp. 3-4). Hence there is a 'holistic' approach in their methodologies, based on the concern to set within