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An urban morphological bible? A view from China

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With the rapid spread of interest in urban morphology, the monograph on Alnwick has become the most important medium by which scholars have come to know the morphogenetic ideas of M. R. G. Conzen. It has recently been translated into Chinese and Italian. In this monograph, the concept of the urban landscape or townscape was enunciated as a tripartite division: town plan, building fabric and land utilization (Conzen, 1960, p. 3). *Alnwick* has had a major influence on a subsequent generation of researchers (Whitehand, 2001).

Curiously, however, in light of Conzen's great contribution to the study of urban form, the study of Alnwick was concerned only with the town plan. His envisaged eventual treatment of other aspects of the urban form of Alnwick never materialized. Yet this detailed research on the town plan (Conzen, 1960, 1969) has for newcomers to the Conzenian approach, especially for researchers outside Britain, become almost a guide book. It has been cited far more than any of Conzen's other publications (Table 1).

However, the majority of interest in Conzen's work has arisen since the 1980s, much of it since his death in 2000. A major factor accounting for this long-delayed influence was undoubtedly the relatively small amount of research undertaken on urban morphology in the decades of the 1960s,

1970s and 1980s. Now, in contrast, urban morphology is undergoing unprecedented popularity, including in China (Lu, 2014). But new key works of comparable influence to *Alnwick* have as yet not been forthcoming. This would not have been such a significant problem if Conzen's widely scattered publications on aspects of urban morphology other than plan analysis had become better known. Unfortunately, his integrative work on 'Urban morphology: its nature and development' was never completed. An outline of it, prepared between 1992 and 1999, is all that reached publication (Conzen, 2004, pp. 269-83).

With the major expansion of ISUF in recent years, *Alnwick* has for some become a kind of urban morphological bible. Enthusiasm for Conzen's approach has been forthcoming from researchers in various countries: fringe belts, plot cycles and plan units are among the phenomena that have been explored, often in environments remote from Alnwick. But this needs to be complemented by greater knowledge of his other publications as a basis for building securely on the foundations that he has provided. Unpublished documents in the University of Birmingham's Conzen Collection have potential to give a more complete picture of Conzen's conception of urban morphology. Completing the task left unfinished by his demise is a major challenge.

Table 1. Citations of M. R. G. Conzen's major works

Year of publication	Title	Number of Citations
1958	<i>The growth and character of Whitby</i>	30
1960	<i>Alnwick, Northumberland: a study in town- plan analysis</i> (reprinted 1969)	406
1962	<i>The plan analysis of an English city centre</i> (reprinted 1981)	112
1966	<i>Historical townscapes in Britain: a problem in applied geography</i> (reprinted 1981)	72
1975	<i>Geography and townscape conservation</i> (reprinted 1981)	54
1978	<i>The morphology of towns in Britain during the industrial era</i> (originally in German: in English translation 1981)	30
1988	<i>Morphogenesis, morphogenetic regions and secular human agency in the historic townscape, as exemplified by Ludlow</i> (revised and reprinted 2004)	59

Source: Google Scholar (accessed 25 November 2014)

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