



VIEWPOINTS

Discussion of topical issues
in urban morphology

More transatlantic myopia?

Ivor Samuels, Urban Morphology Research Group, School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Birmingham, Birmingham B15 2TT, UK. E-mail: ivor.samuels@googlemail.com

One of the factors emerging from the ISUF Task Force exchanges was recognition of the importance of the inclusion of material on urban morphology in higher education curricula. It was suggested that this was essential to equip practitioners for their professional careers, especially in the field of planning and urban design. Accordingly ISUF members were invited to submit the content of courses that use material relating to urban morphology.

The results of this invitation have been limited. Eight contributions were received; three from Portugal, three from Italy and one each from China, Colombia, and Taiwan. Emily Talen pointed out that her website (<http://www.design4planning>) covering planning curricula concerned with design, offered a possible source of material relating to urban morphological topics as well as being a site for the uploading of this type of material. With the exception of two Canadian courses, and a Colombian one, the contributions come from establishments in the United States. The curricula material is organized in seven categories with a total of 173 entries:

History/Theory /Principles	41
Environmental/Site Design	21
Methods/Tools	32
Workshops/Studios	33
Images /Databases	18
Writings /Websites	22
Video	6

An inspection of the seven groups indicated that the greatest potential for finding authors with links to urban morphology would be in the first four, which cover 74 per cent of the entries. The results of an analysis of 127 course curricula are presented in Table 1.

Authors have been cited rather than the titles of their different works since the listing of titles would have resulted in a very unwieldy table. For similar reasons different works by the same authors have been counted together – for example, four works by Lynch were cited that together received a total of 24 citations. The numerous references to authors associated with the New Urbanism movement also have been grouped together. While the extent to which New Urbanist authors can be included within the scope of urban morphology has been discussed in these pages (Scheer, 2008), and they figure on the map of Gauthier and Gilliland (2006), an attempt to distinguish between the cited authors was beyond the scope of this study.

There is a notable paucity of authors associated with ISUF; Moudon is the only one with a few citations, while Conzen has one. Surprisingly for anyone coming from a British context there is only one reference to Space Syntax and, even more surprising, there is no reference at all to arguably what remains the most influential teaching text for urban design in the UK: *Responsive environments* (Bentley *et al.*, 1985) which is now in its eighteenth reprint and has been translated into Chinese,

Table 1. Authors cited in curricula on <http://www.design4planning>

Authors	Category				Total
	History	Methods	Environment	Workshop	
Alexander	5	1	3	5	14
Anderson			1		1
Barnet	3	1		1	5
Bacon	7		1	2	10
Batty		1			1
Benevolo	1		2		3
Beatley <i>et al.</i>	4		1		5
Calvino				1	1
Carmona	3	1		1	5
Cullen	1	1	3	2	7
Conzen M. R. G.	1				1
Le Corbusier	5	1	1		7
Garreau		1	1		2
Gehl	2		4	1	7
Hall P.	3	1	1		5
Jacobs J.	12		2	4	18
Jacobs A.	6	1	5	7	19
Jenks <i>et al.</i>			1		1
Kostof	2		2	1	5
Koolhaas	6		1		7
Krier L. & R.	7		1	2	10
Lynch	11	1	6	6	24
Morris	3	1			4
Moudon	2	1	2	1	6
New Urbanism	38	1	7	24	70
Newman	1	5	3		9
Rossi	2	1			3
Rowe	3	1	1		5
Rapoport		1	1		2
Sitte	4	1	2		7
Space syntax	1				1
Time Saver Standards	2		2		4
Unwin			1		1
UD Companion	3			2	5
UD Reader	6		1	1	8
Whyte	4		4	3	11

Japanese and Spanish.

This pattern of interest and these omissions cannot be ascribed to anglophone squint (Whitehand, 2005) but rather to a transatlantic myopia (Samuels, 2012). The extent to which material is chosen according to fashion or to being easily accessible, whether because of facility of language

or liberal use of illustrations, is a topic for further investigation, and which would have a bearing on attempts to translate urban morphological concepts into the world of practice.

The contributors to the American website have to be admired for their openness in presenting their material for public scrutiny. In the UK there are 44

courses recognized by the Royal Institute of British Architects and 29 recognized by the Royal Town Planning Institute. To ascertain the presence of urban morphology material in those courses attempts were made to penetrate their websites beyond the self-laudatory material claiming how good the courses are. This has so far failed to give anything like the same amount of information as is easily available on the *design4planning* website or the remarkable amount of available Spanish course material (Ruiz-Apilánez *et al.*, 2015). Only 10 per cent of the planning courses give any references. It may be that it is a question of commercial confidentiality as the academy becomes more dominated by a managerial ethos. Napoleon is reputed to have said that England was a nation of shopkeepers – perhaps it still is.

References

- Bentley, I., Alcock, A., Murrain, P., McGlynn, S. and Smith, G. (1985) *Responsive environments; a manual for designers* (Architectural Press, Oxford).
- Gauthier, P. and Gilliland, J. (2006) 'Mapping urban morphology: a classification scheme for interpreting contributions to the study of urban form', *Urban Morphology* 10, 41-50.
- Ruiz-Apilánez, B., Solis, E. and de Ureña, J. N. (2015) 'Urban morphological curricula in Spanish schools of architecture', *Urban Morphology* 19, 146-56.
- Samuels, I. (2012) 'Anglophone squint and transatlantic myopia', *Urban Morphology* 16, 76-8.
- Scheer, B. (2008) 'Urban morphology and urban design', *Urban Morphology* 12, 140-2.
- Talen, E. (2014) *Design for planning; resources for planning educators* (<http://www.design4planning>) accessed 10 November 2014.
- Whitehand, J. W. R. (2005) 'Overcoming anglophone squint', *Urban Morphology* 9, 3-4.

A 'resilient' urban morphology: TRUST

Chrisna du Plessis, Karina Landman, Darren Nel and Edna Peres, Think Tank on Resilient Urban Systems in Transition (TRUST), School of the Built Environment, University of Pretoria, Private Bag X20, Hatfield 028, Pretoria, South Africa. Email: chrisna.duplessis@up.ac.za

Over the last 25 years, urban form in South Africa has undergone significant change associated with rapid urban migration, urban poverty, informality and resource scarcity, as well as new social, economic and political systems. In this environment, inherited urban form has been significant in the resilience of South African cities, with new development often continuing established patterns.

The types of challenges that have emerged are, of course, not limited to Southern Africa. Cities more widely are experiencing unprecedented socio-economic pressures in an increasingly inflexible global system, and these are coupled with increasingly critical responses to environmental pressures such as climate change. Tackling the complexity of the challenges requires a socio-ecological-systems view in which the city is seen as a living system composed of interdependent morphological, ecological and socio-cultural processes and structures, the interactions of which affect urban resilience, allowing cities to persist over time. The Think Tank on Resilient Urban Systems

in Transition (TRUST) is much concerned with this perspective (<http://trustsa.weebly.com>). It investigates how thinking about urban resilience can enable urban systems to endure and thrive beyond the challenges that the world is currently facing.

Those of us in TRUST see urban form as a major factor in urban resilience. We concur with Salat and Bourdic (2012, p. 65) that urban resilience can be understood as the robustness of urban structures and networks in the face of random failures. These failures can occur as small- or large-scale disruptions. Their occurrence is greatly influenced by the form of cities (Nel and Landman, 2015).

Achieving urban resilience, and the consequent evolution and survival of cities, requires understanding how urban form can accommodate adaptation through incremental changes that facilitate transformation and diversity. Urban form aids (and hinders) urban resilience in several ways. First, it facilitates the creation of those complex environments that tend to be more successful