

## Twenty-Third International Seminar on Urban Form, Nanjing, China, 8–10 July 2016

This was the second ISUF conference to be held in China. It was hosted by the School of Architecture and Urban Planning at Nanjing University on the Gulou Campus, occupying precious green space within the historical walled area of Nanjing. The overarching theme of the conference was ‘Urban morphology and the resilient city’.

Nanjing was a suitable place for such a conference. The establishment of the city of Nanjing can be traced back about 2500 years. It lies on the western edge of the Yangtze River Delta, which is becoming the fastest urbanizing region in China (perhaps in the world). Its growth has been driven by strong economic forces. Its pace of growth has been accelerating, especially in last decade, and it is now a metropolis with a population of about 8 million. As a historical city under great development pressure, the urban form of Nanjing is being heavily challenged by a number of conflicts, for example between old and new, traditional and modern, conservation and redevelopment, and consolidation and expansion. For researchers and practitioners concerned with urban form, it is important to explore a resilient way to cope with these challenges.

Like the previous ISUF conference in China (in Guangzhou in 2009), this conference in Nanjing reflected in particular the major continuing endeavours of ISUF to promote the development of urban morphology in cultural areas outside those in Europe and North America where many of the ideas and methods originally developed.

Following the meeting of the ISUF Council immediately before the start of the Conference (Figure 1), eight plenary sessions and 35 paper sessions took place over three days, with 137 presentations, and more than 200 participants coming from 5 continents. As expected, Asia was the most represented part of the world, with about three-quarters of the papers presented emanating from this continent.

The keynote presentations were on ‘Urban morphology: taking the long view’ (Jeremy Whitehand, University of Birmingham); ‘Plan analysis of historical cities: a Sino-European comparison’ (Michael Conzen, University of Chicago); ‘Studies of Chinese traditional towns and the approach to urban morphology’ (Chen Zhao, Nanjing University); ‘Teaching urban morphology’ (Vitor Oliveira, Universidade do Porto);



**Figure 1. ISUF Council discussing the progress report of the Advisory Committee on the Future Development of ISUF. Photograph by Youpei Hu.**



**Figure 2.** A section of fringe belt adjacent to Nanjing's Ming city wall, with part of the city centre in the background. Photograph by Jinlong Feng.

'Florence: the geometry of urban form' (Giancarlo Cataldi, University of Florence); 'Principles of safe separation for planning between industrial and residential areas' (Weimin Que, Peking University); 'The epistemology of urban morphology' (Brenda Scheer, University of Utah); 'Urban management units and metabolism urban regeneration' (Yinsheng Tian, South China University of Technology).

For his part, Whitehand traced the development of urban morphology from the mid-nineteenth century, revealing the importance of contributions stemming mainly from three disciplines: geography, architecture and history. Early urban morphology was clearly multidisciplinary. In the course of the second half of the twentieth century, four schools of thought (Conzenian, Muratorian, Versailles and Berkeley) had formed and developed separately. To break this condition of mutual isolation, ISUF was inaugurated in the mid-1990s as a platform for communication among urban morphologists. The marked increase in the number of papers at the annual conferences, and in the journal *Urban Morphology*, and the numerous journals dealing with urban morphology in recent years reflect the growth of the discipline (Whitehand, 2012, p. 56). But more interdisciplinary communication is needed. In the last part of his address, Whitehand

illustrated current advances in, and possible future developments of, fringe-belt research, including in Nanjing (Figure 2). He built on early contributions by M. R. G. Conzen and his mentor Herbert Louis who had first recognized the fringe-belt concept in his paper of 1936 on the geographical structure of Greater Berlin. It was strongly suggested that better understanding of past developments of urban morphology would benefit decisions on its future development.

Conzen began his presentation by clarifying the aim of comparative urban morphology as being 'to distinguish both patterns and formative cultural processes that are universal from those that are more limited by geography, history, and local practice'. He highlighted the value of the approach of plan analysis in 'making sense of the extremely complex patterns contained in accurate, large-scale urban maps' and providing 'a fundamental template upon which further morphological study can proceed'. He described his recent comparative research on the Chinese city of Pingyao and the Italian city of Como that he had undertaken in collaboration with Jeremy Whitehand and ISUF Secretary-General Kai Gu. He posited that the principal cultural factors about values based on cosmology, as well as the differing perceptions of public and private in urban society, were essential

to understanding contrasts of urban form between East and West.

The paper sessions were grouped in relation to nine topics: (1) Urban morphological theory; (2) Urban morphology and urban design/planning; (3) Urban form, society and technology; (4) The fringe-belt concept; (5) Urban morphology, sustainability, and climatic change; (6) Transformation and resilience in urban development; (7) Urban form in the global era; (8) Urban form in Asia; and (9) East and West: similarities and contrasts.

Topics 3, 7 and 8 were addressed by the largest number of papers. To appreciate the potentially interrelated character of these superficially fairly discrete topics it is helpful to bear in mind M. R. G. Conzen's tripartite division of the urban landscape into first, the town plan, secondly, the building fabric, and thirdly, land and building utilization. Comprising streets, plots and building block-plans, the town plan forms the inescapable framework for the other man-made features of urban form (Conzen, 1960, pp. 3–4; Whitehand, 2001, p. 104), as was evident from Michael Conzen's keynote presentation.

Topic 2, focusing on the scope of urban morphology in practice, contained numerous presentations. Several papers dealt with creative projects, with somewhat individual traits, that were idealistically trying to transform current socio-economic requirements into concrete reality. A recurrent feature was the paucity of wider environmental understanding. In this respect, it is believed that urban morphology as a systematic research approach could make more contributions in future. Several presentations prompted reflection on the scope for further developing quantitative approaches in urban morphology and the prospect of their more direct and effective application in design and planning practice.

In relation to changes in urban form, papers dealing with topics 5 and 6 contained several interesting explorations. With exacerbation of the global environmental crisis, a number of related concerns, such as carbon emissions, energy efficiency and climatic change, are being considered in relation to conservation and the reshaping of existing urban forms. And it is anticipated that urban morphological research will aid realization of the ideal of the sustainable resilient city through exploration of valuable experience of past successes and failures embodied in the existing physical environment.

Addressing comparisons between East and West, topic 9 contained papers discussing such

matters as ancient times, religious sites and urban cores. Problems of non-comparability of definitions, methods and concepts evidently still remain (Whitehand, 2012, p. 60). However, there is a continuing process of developing general principles within the conceptual frameworks of urban morphology. This is benefiting mutual understanding of the distinctive geographical regions of East and West, and giving direction to their further morphological exploration.

In addition to the formal paper sessions, much valuable interaction took place between participants informally: for example, during coffee breaks, lunches, social events and the welcome conference dinner held in a wonderful atmosphere. This included discussions between those from widely differing cultural-geographical regions of the world.

Immediately following the conference, many participants took part in one-day excursions. One such excursion in the old city of Nanjing included visits to the campus of Nanjing University, located in the middle fringe belt; Jiming temple located in the Ming fringe belt; the fixation line of the city wall constructed in the Ming dynasty; and the Ganxi residence located in the commercial area in the southern part of the walled city. The latter contained a large group of courtyard houses originally constructed in 1796–1821 by the previously powerful Gan clan.

Sincere thanks are extended to the ISUF 2016 organizing committee for their great endeavours to arrange a smooth, thought-provoking conference. They have raised our expectations as we look forward to the ISUF 2017 Conference in Valencia, Spain.

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Jian Zhang, College of Horticulture and Forestry, Huazhong Agricultural University, 1 Shizishan Road, Wuhan, Hubei 430070, P. R. China. E-mail: zhangjian@mail.hzau.edu.cn



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## ISUF business meetings, Nanjing, China, July 2016

Meetings of the Council and Editorial Board of ISUF took place on Thursday 7 July in Nanjing, immediately before the ISUF 2016 Conference held at the School of Architecture, University of Nanjing. 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, Giancarlo Cataldi, reported on the continuing good health of ISUF and recalled the first meeting in Lausanne in 1994 when the English and Italian schools of thought came together. Both approaches should play their part in the establishment of a common theoretical framework.

He recorded that the Progress Report of the Advisory Committee on the Future Development of ISUF addressed a number of matters and in particular gave consideration to the development of Regional Networks.

### Secretary-General's report

The Secretary-General, Kai Gu, reported that the conference guidance had been updated and that as a working document it should be updated every 3 to 4 years. Guidelines were being drawn up in relation to the establishment of Regional Networks. These should enable effective communication with Council as well as between individual Networks. Such a guide should also help to co-ordinate the development and future activities of Networks.

Wowo Ding, her colleagues and volunteer helpers were thanked for a very successful conference. The conference for 2017 would take place in Valencia, Spain.

### Treasurer's report

The Treasurer, Michael Barke, reported on the sound financial position of ISUF. The price of the journal *Urban Morphology* was very competitive and the number of subscribing libraries continued to grow steadily. However, the cost of producing *Urban Morphology* was likely to increase and this needed to be budgeted for.

A significant positive balance enabled Council to consider the promotion of specific projects and/or competitions. In particular approval was given to a competition proposed by the Task Force on Research and Practice, and to a project yet to be finalized that would involve 2 or more Regional Networks.

Thanks were expressed to the Webmaster, Richard Whitehand, for his efficiency and swift response in dealing with clients.

### Editor's report

The Editor, Jeremy Whitehand, reported that the size of the journal and the mixture of types of contribution had remained largely unchanged in the last few years. The authors contributing to all sections of the journal have continued to be widely spread geographically and from many different language areas. The majority of full-length articles continue to be by authors for whom English is not their first language. Quality control takes up a great deal of editorial and refereeing time.

Online access is currently available for all issues of the journal up to and including 2005. This would shortly be extended to 2008. Online access to more recent issues would continue to be available to subscribing libraries only. The Editor considered that it was time that more effective publicity was undertaken. This would enhance the position and reach of the journal.

The Editor recorded his thanks both to an outstanding editorial team and the many dedicated referees. Efficient refereeing during the period 2015 to 2016 meant that the mean time-lag between the receipt of an article from an author and the communication of a decision to that author was only 3 weeks. The mean time-lag between the receipt of the revised version of an article and its publication was just under 4.5 months.

### Webmaster's report

The Webmaster, Richard Whitehand, reported that usage of the website continued to increase. The website as a whole received approximately 2700 unique 'visits' per month, many of which related to the journal. This represented an increase of 10%

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on the year 2014/15. The most downloaded articles averaged over 200 downloads per month.

The number of institutional subscribers with online access remained much the same. A significant number of the approximately 200 libraries subscribing to the journal had not registered for online access.

### **Report of the Advisory Committee on the Future Development of ISUF**

Vítor Oliveira, chair of the committee, reported that attention had been focused on 5 main goals: i) enhancing the organization of ISUF; ii) enhancing the arenas of the debate on urban form; iii) defining an influential morphological agenda; iv) promoting ISUF and urban morphology as a field of knowledge; and v) strengthening the financial dimension of ISUF. It was agreed to

set up a project to further one or more of these goals and to involve the Regional Networks who would be consulted concerning their research interests.

### **Future conferences**

The Universitat Politècnica de Valencia, Spain will host the ISUF Conference in 2017. The title of the conference will be 'City and territory in the globalization age'. The conference for 2018 will take place at the Siberian Federal University, Krasnoyarsk, Russia.

*Susan Whitehand, Urban Morphology Research Group, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT, UK. E-mail: smwhitehand@hotmail.co.uk*

## **Cyprus Network of Urban Morphology**

Since the Twenty-Second International Seminar on Urban Form in September 2015, a group of members comprising Nevter Zafer Comert, Nadia Charalambous, Şebnem Hoşkara, Alessandro Camiz, Naciye Doratlı and Ilaria Geddes have been working to establish a Cyprus Network of Urban Morphology (CyNUM). The inaugural meeting of CyNUM was hosted by the Home for Co-operation in the UN buffer zone of Nicosia, on 26 May 2016.

The main purpose of the meeting was to diffuse the aims and objectives of the Network as listed in its Constitution. These are: (1) to promote and develop the subject of urban morphology in Cyprus and within the region; (2) to encourage research on urban form and the international dissemination of research findings within different disciplines; (3) to establish and develop, with other Mediterranean countries, a research network in the field of urban morphology through meetings, seminars, conferences, workshops, a website, a newsletter in the short term, and, in the longer term, the publication of a journal; (4) to develop connections with other organizations (for example, universities, NGOs, and research centres) concerned with the built environment, in both the South and North of Cyprus, and in other Mediterranean countries; (5) to establish a privileged relationship with the

International Seminar on Urban Form (ISUF), through collaboration in ISUF initiatives concerning the promotion of urban morphology; (6) to develop and broaden collaborative studies of urban form, at the national and international level, in particular across the Mediterranean area, through co-operation with researchers in different fields of knowledge and different institutions, as well as other ISUF networks and the central body of ISUF.

At the inaugural meeting, Vítor Oliveira, from the Portuguese Network of Urban Morphology, and Tolga Ünlü, from the Turkish Network of Urban Morphology, were guest speakers. They shared with the meeting the experience gained in their own networks. Fruitful discussions took place within the meeting, during which three issues were addressed. First, the structure of the Network; secondly, the decision to organize a National Conference to share research on urban morphology in Cyprus; and thirdly, methods of bringing together researchers for exchanges of views and dissemination of research. The official website of the Cyprus Network of Urban Morphology is <http://www.cynum.org>

*Nevter Zafer Comert, Department of Architecture, Faculty of Architecture, Famagusta, North Cyprus, Mersin 10, Turkey. E-mail: nzafer@gmail.com*

## Portuguese-language Network of Urban Morphology: President's Report

This report summarizes the main activities of the Portuguese-language Network of Urban Morphology (PNUM) between July 2015 and July 2016.

The PNUM Conference on 'The spaces of urban morphology', the fifth in the annual series, took place on 15–16 July 2016, in the Centro Cultural Vila Flor at the historic centre of Guimarães, Portugal. It was co-ordinated by Jorge Correia and Miguel Bandeira, from the University of Minho and the City Council of Braga respectively. The participants included a significant number of students and young researchers.

The Second Workshop promoted by PNUM, on 'Urban form and cross-border dynamics', co-ordinated by David Viana, took place in the Vila Nova de Cerveira, at Escola Superior Gallaecia between 19 and 23 July 2016, immediately after the PNUM Conference. The Workshop benefited from the collaboration of colleagues from Galicia, north Portugal and Brazil. Like the initial workshop, it aimed to promote the analysis and the application of a number of methodological approaches: the historico-geographical approach of the Conzenian School, the typological approach of the Muratorian School, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and space syntax. The area examined was the border region located between the north of Portugal and Galicia. It is expected that the results of the workshop, like those of the previous workshop, will be published in an e-book (Oliveira and Monteiro, 2016).

*Revista de Morfologia Urbana*, edited by Vítor Oliveira, is already in its 6th issue. It continues to contain translations of seminal works originally published in English in *Urban Morphology*.

Attention is drawn to two specific books: *Urban morphology: an introduction to the study of the physical form of cities*, by Vítor Oliveira (2016) and *Fundamentos de morfologia urbana* by Staël Pereira da Costa and Maria Manoela Netto (2015). These are particularly important for their pedagogical perspectives. Reviews of publications by

PNUM members have also appeared in the book review section of *Urban Morphology* (Coelho, 2015; Dufaux, 2015).

Finally, it is PNUM's wish to continue to promote the study of urban form both within the Portuguese-language Network and also internationally, thus contributing to the development of ISUF. With this in view, it was suggested by Teresa Marat-Mendes at the ISUF Council meeting at the ISUF Conference in 2015, that a task force be created with the aim of strengthening ISUF's regional network connections, including those of PNUM. Furthermore, an agenda common to the various networks was proposed, including: i) the identification of interactions between the various regional networks; ii) the strengthening of ISUF's multicultural identity, and adding to its visibility; and iii) the identification of possible shared morphological approaches, either historical or contemporary.

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Teresa Marat-Mendes, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), DINÂMIA'CET-IUL, Departamento de Arquitectura e Urbanismo, Av. das Forças Armadas, 1649–026 Lisboa, Portugal. E-mail: [teresa.marat-mendes@iscte.pt](mailto:teresa.marat-mendes@iscte.pt)