



## VIEWPOINTS

Discussion of topical issues  
in urban morphology

### Publishing an urban morphological classic

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Sixty years ago M. R. G. Conzen was preparing the first version of *Alnwick, Northumberland: a study in town-plan analysis* (Conzen, 1960). Much attention has focused on the contents and influence of this key contribution to urban morphology. But practically nothing is known about the vicissitudes it underwent in the period between completion of an initial text in 1957 and actual publication of the monograph in 1960. Examination of records held in the M. R. G. Conzen Collection in the University of Birmingham allows considerable light to be shed on the practicalities and processes involved in bringing to the point of publication this important work. And some of what is revealed may come as a surprise to many engaged in urban morphological research and publication today

The study of Alnwick was first accepted for publication in the Research Series of the Department of Geography of King's College in the University of Durham (later the University of Newcastle upon Tyne and now Newcastle University), benefiting from the support of the Head of Department, Henry Daysh. However, the size of the study, comprising 66 000 words and 15 drawings, was considered beyond the financial budget of the Series and Conzen had to seek another publisher.

At the beginning of 1958, Conzen submitted the study to the Institute of British Geographers (IBG) through the editor Robert W. Steel. The IBG Council eventually decided in favour of publication – but not until 1959. Furthermore, it set two major conditions: first, that the text should be

somewhat simplified and substantially reduced in length in consultation with the main referee, Arthur E. Smailes; and secondly, that additional financial support be secured from King's College or another source.

Smailes's review highlighted the 'scholarship' of the monograph and its contribution to urban geography, stressing that its special merit was as a 'type study' developing general concepts that would be applicable to other old-established British towns. He recommended that the historical development and physical setting of Alnwick should be briefly summarized to avoid weakening the main strengths of the study. Conzen agreed to this. The emphasis on the local dimension had been contingent on the original publication proposal presented to Daysh attracting financial support from local bodies in North-East England. Conzen also agreed on emphasizing the significance of the work for the theory of urban morphology, convinced that it would open a wide field of investigation.

The study of Alnwick's town plan was part of a more comprehensive piece of research. It was proposed by Conzen that this should be explained in the preface to the monograph but was omitted at the request of Smailes. This larger piece of research was to be divided into two main parts: the first an analysis of the town plan; and the second an analysis of two elements – the building fabric and land utilization. These three elements were, in Conzen's words, 'interdependent in the geographical reality of the townscape, and their treatment separately

can only be a matter of emphasis and not of sharp systematic division' (Conzen, 1969, p. 4).

One main goal was to propose a number of fundamental concepts for the explanation of town plans on evolutionary lines, using this market town for demonstration. In line with the pressure of the editor to reduce special terminology to a minimum, Smailes suggested that the glossary of technical terms should be eliminated. Conzen very reluctantly acquiesced in this, but successfully argued for the retention of a number of tables that quantified development by historical periods. He believed that the elimination of these quantitative features that had been suggested by Smailes would be an important methodological loss.

The preparation of the shortened version of the monograph, now about 48 000 words, incorporated the referee's and the editor's suggestions. Elimination of the glossary, meant that each technical term needed to be defined where it first occurred in the text. The opportunity was also taken to rearrange parts of the text and improve the presentation of major themes, in particular the discussion of fringe belts. In this process Conzen was supported by Herbert J. Fleure, who had considerable editorial experience and a long-term interest in urban morphology.

The final revised version included some new illustrations and some redesigned ones. There were in total 21 figures (maps and plans), some of them folded maps and a number in colour, and four plates. The use of coloured and folded illustrations was in Conzen's view absolutely necessary, but increased considerably the cost of publication.

As the IBG was a professional organization publishing on a non-profit basis, Steel asked Conzen to seek more financial contributions. The application for financial support to the Rector of King's College, Dr C. I. C. Bosanquet, was successful. In addition to the financial support provided by King's College, the Rector appealed to local institutions and individuals. The Sir James Knott Trust, the Duke of Northumberland, Lord Howick, Sir Steven Runciman, Mr William Robertson and the Rector himself, all contributed. This made it possible for several of the maps to be pull-outs and printed in two or three colours. The Rector's personal interest in the work was of major importance.

In October 1960, over 3 years after completion of the original manuscript, *Alnwick* was finally published. It has turned out to be a groundbreaking contribution to urban morphology. We can only speculate as to whether any of those involved in the efforts in the late 1950s to achieve its publication would have forecast such an outcome.

## References

- Conzen, M. R. G. (1960) *Alnwick, Northumberland: a study in town-plan analysis* Institute of British Geographers Publication 27 (George Philip, London).  
 Conzen, M. R. G. (1969) *Alnwick, Northumberland: a study in town-plan analysis* Institute of British Geographers Publication 27 (Institute of British Geographers, London) 2nd edn.

## Recent developments in the Caniggian School

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Over the last 2 decades, there has been an increasing interest in the theoretical and practical framework progressively developed by Gianfranco Caniggia. It has been manifested in a variety of journal articles, books and conference presentations. The English translation of the seminal book on processual typology (Caniggia and Maffei, 2001), published on the occasion of the ISUF conference in Cincinnati, was in a sense an invitation, addressed to an international audience, to reflect

on the content and method of Caniggia's work. Since the second edition of this translation is about to appear, it is timely to reflect on the main emerging lines of research.

### *The role of Saverio Muratori*

Several contributions specifically address the role of Saverio Muratori, who was undoubtedly the