

ISUF President's Report 2016/17

If the aim of the President's report is to analyze the state of our organization, it must be said that all quantitative 'demographic' indices indicate that it is in good health. Nonetheless, the 25th year of ISUF's activities and the related generational turnover will entail a number of adjustments, including those associated with the arrival of a new generation of experts in urban morphology.

In this last of my President's Reports I welcome the new President, Wendy McClure, and wish her a successful term of office. It is also timely to highlight what has been a 'winning' formula for ISUF: that of 'continuity of change' which has supported a kind of translinguistic and transnational axis that has carried us forward. A key feature has been the international success of urban morphology as an interdisciplinary field of study in which architects, geographers, historians, sociologists and others are called upon to provide answers to urban problems, not least concerning the expansion of cities worldwide.

The annual conferences, the first of four fundamental 'pillars' of ISUF, have increased in size in the last few years, and those in Porto, Rome, Nanjing and Valencia have undoubtedly been successful. To Vítor Oliveira, Giuseppe Strappa, Wowo Ding, Vicente Colomer and their collaborators go our thanks for excellent organizational work. They have provided a high standard for our next Conference, in Krasnoyarsk, to maintain. This move to Russia, could represent the beginning of a new cycle, yielding useful suggestions and observations concerning the implementation of the necessary strategies for the next stage in ISUF's development.

Urban Morphology, our second 'pillar', is on track with its two issues per year, the recent of which have been notable for the particularly effective use of colour. I will never tire of underlining the importance of the precious editorial work of

Jeremy Whitehand and his editorial team, in addition to the 'hidden' work of the referees called upon to maintain the high scientific esteem in which the journal is regarded.

During the conference in Valencia, a memorable moment for me was the plenary session of the regional networks, the third 'pillar' of ISUF. The simultaneous presence on stage of the representatives of each regional network focused attention most effectively on our growing genealogical tree.

As for the Advisory Committee on the Future Development of ISUF, suffice to say that it embraces many of the proposals elaborated by the numerous task forces of the last few years. And I should like to thank in particular Vítor Oliveira for commitment to this committee. It is mostly to this fourth 'pillar' that the prospects for renewal of our organization are entrusted. In addition to strengthening the cohesion of researchers and schools of thought, a key task to carry forward is the crucial endeavour of improving the relationship between theoretical research and planning praxis.

Finally, I wish to thank the members of the Council, who have had to suffer my 'unlikely' English. In particular we are indebted to Secretary-General Kai Gu for his wise 'diplomatic' management of our organization; Treasurer Michael Barke for the great care he has taken of our finances, not least the precision and clarity of the annual accounts; and lastly, again, Jeremy Whitehand, for the typically British understatement with which he has guided the direction of *Urban Morphology*, from which stems much of the international reputation of ISUF.

Giancarlo Cataldi, Dipartimento di Architettura, Università di Firenze, Via della Mattonaia 14, 50121, Firenze, Italy. E-mail: giancarlo.cataldi@gmail.com

Twenty-Fourth International Seminar on Urban Form, Valencia, Spain 27–29 September 2017

At the opening of the conference, José Salvador (City of Valencia), Iván Cabrese (Director, School of Architecture, Polytechnic University of Valencia) and Vicente Colomer (Conference Chair), set an ambitious agenda for the conference with a call to combine a global understanding of the world with a local reading of 'place'. The first

keynote speaker Giancarlo Cataldi (University of Florence) took us on a diagrammatic journey to set the stage for a general theory of urban morphology (Figure 1). He showed that urban morphology can be divided into four processes that should be seen as integrated parts: *reading* urban form, *projecting* new concepts, *materializing* these concepts,

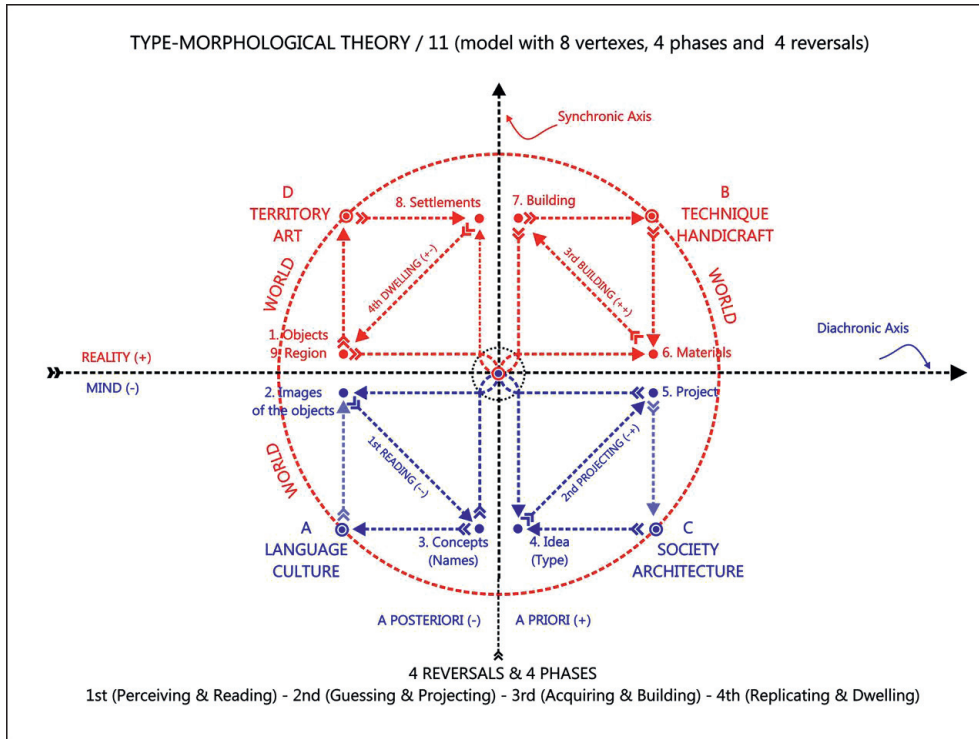


Figure 1. Cataldi's basis for a general theory of urban morphology.

and *lived* space. The diagrams were intriguing, but at first sight so full of concepts and relations that few could grasp their depth. They reminded me of the diagrams published by Marshall and Çalişkan (2011) in which they mapped the theoretical contributions within the framework of urban morphology and design and made a distinction between recognition, design, construction, and making.

The second keynote speaker, Joan Busquets (Harvard University and Centro Universitario de Diseño de Barcelona) addressed the secrets of 'good cities'. His hypothesis was that more regular cities are better for the future and the gridded city seems to be the answer, though he did not explore the performance of such patterns in comparison with less regular ones.

The third keynote speaker on this packed first day was Bárbara Pons, an architect and consultant in sustainable planning and landscaping. She presented the challenges our urbanizing planet is facing, from inequality to ecosystem stress. Anyone following my work must know that the two spatial issues she put on the ISUF agenda are important to me. The first was the problem of *scale* that she claimed needs to be addressed to enable inclusion of the environmental dimension in our work. In a way she referred back to the opening words of

Vicente Colomer in which he pleaded for study of local and global dimensions simultaneously. To do so, one needs (in my words) to read cities as systems in which the local can only be understood by understanding the context or, as Muratori formulated it, as part of the city as organism (Panerai *et al.*, 1999). Also the theory of space syntax (Hillier and Hanson, 1984) is grounded on this parts-and-whole discussion and could enrich discussions in urban morphology.

The second issue that Pons raised was the matter of *quantity*, where density plays a central role. She showed a worrying diagram (Figure 2) of decreasing densities in cities all over the world despite knowledge that higher densities are needed, for example to reduce CO₂ emissions, energy consumption and land fragmentation (Berghauer Pont and Haupt, 2010). Her presentation was calling out for us to think in terms of city performance and make our cities part of the solution instead of the problem. It complemented well the presentation of Busquets, but what was lacking was urban form!

The keynote presentation by José Luis Vallejo (founder of *ecosistema urbano*) put people at the centre of the stage and argued for interactive design in which architecture and users are in constant dialogue. His work is about participatory

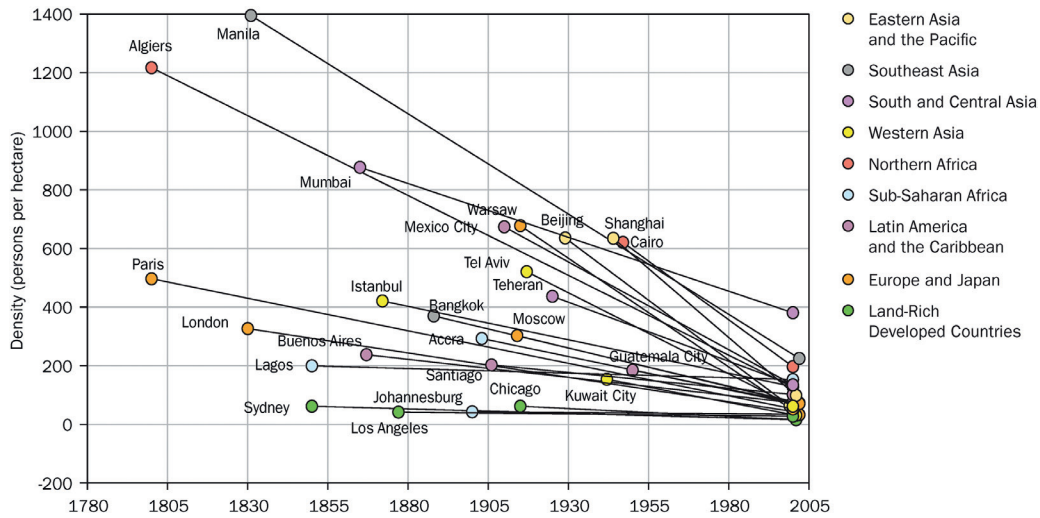


Figure 2. Decreasing population densities in urban areas in 25 representative cities, 1800–2000. Source: Angel (2011, p. 23) *Making room for a planet of cities* (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy).

processes, but this does not necessarily inform us about the performance of the buildings. It is more about construction than recognition to use the words of Marshall and Çalişkan (2011).

The two last keynote speakers were Luis Alonso de Armino (Polytechnic University of Valencia) and Javier Monclus (University of Zaragoza). Armino's discussion of the exceptional quality of the extension plan of Valencia (1907) was reminiscent of Busquet's 'good city' (meaning regular city). Javier Monclus recommended that our practice should be informed by planning history and theory. Believing that one solution, such as the regular or gridded city, can provide universal solutions to the challenges we are facing is, in this light, somewhat naïve.

Summarizing this series of keynote presentations, the *challenges* to our cities were addressed loud and clear. However, little was said about what the *answers* could be in urban form (other than gridded cities). Another matter I cannot refrain from commenting on was the dominance of male keynote speakers (five compared with only two females). Evidently this is another challenge for the ISUF community to work on, but this should be a much easier one.

As far as the parallel sessions were concerned, it was hard to get an overview when 10 sessions were often taking place in parallel. Approximately 360 presentations were given in 60 sessions, leaving us all with the feeling that we had missed a lot. I listened to many interesting papers in which

the quantification of urban form and the use of big data and statistics were central. I see this as a clear revival of what Moudon (1992) described as space-morphology, in which she included the seminal work on *Urban space and structures* by Martin and March (1972) and *The social logic of space* by Hillier and Hanson (1984). The presented work covered new measures of urban form (for example by Hanzl *et al.*, and Marcus *et al.*), GIS driven analytical tools (for example, by Vialard, and Iranmanesh *et al.*) and the development of typologies using advanced statistics (for example, by Stojanovski, and Fusco *et al.*). Often these sessions triggered lively debates in which the audience raised questions about the lack of qualitative methods and about how the work described related to earlier work within the various schools of urban morphology and, in turn, the impact it might have. These are relevant questions and should be addressed more frequently where comparisons between methods (such as Monteiro *et al.* presented), integrations of methods and relations to theory (such as Marcus *et al.* addressed) are ways to proceed and advance the field.

In the closing session, the new President of ISUF, Wendy McClure (University of Idaho), gave a striking view of where we have come from, referring to the first ISUF President Anne Vernez Moudon and the founding mission of ISUF 'to create a forum to accumulate, disseminate and share knowledge about urban morphology'. This inspiring conference definitely lived up to this mission.

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- Meta Berghauser Pont, Chalmers University of Technology, Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering, Sven Hultins gata 6, SE-412 96 Göteborg, Sweden. E-mail: meta.berghauser-pont@chalmers.se*

Sixth Conference of the Portuguese-language Network of Urban Morphology, Vitória, ES, Brazil, 24–25 August 2017

This Sixth Conference of PNUM was impeccably co-ordinated by Eneida de Souza Mendonça, with the collaboration of Milton Esteves Júnior, a large organizing committee and a team of truly enthusiastic volunteers. More than 300 participants attended at both venues: the Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo and the Hotel Golden Tulip Porto Vitória.

Under the overall theme of 'Urban morphology: territory, landscape and planning', the conference was structured in relation to seven sub-themes: Methods of interaction with urban form; Configuration, urban form and reform; Urban history and material/immaterial heritage; Urban and territorial configuration; Urban systems and the suburban condition; Morphological patterns and the urban systems of free space; Built environment and sustainability.

There were 331 abstracts submitted, of which over two-thirds were approved. About 140 papers were ultimately presented, many of them comprising preliminary or final results of higher degree theses. Discussions were spread over 28 parallel sessions covering the two days of the conference.

Thematic sessions were marked by keynote and plenary addresses in the opening and closing ceremonies. On the opening day Prof. Maria Elaine Kohlsdorf, of the Universidade de Brasília, spoke on 'Apprehension of urban form and the morphological performance of places'. Offering reflections on the concepts of architecture and design, she explored the relationships between apprehension and explanation of urban form, between social prospects and morphological attributes, and on visual perception in relation to design representation. This systematization provided an excellent introduction to themes, methodologies and

urban strategies that various subsequent papers considered.

Closing the conference, Prof. Vítor Oliveira, of the Universidade do Porto, led the participants on a tour of ISUF and PNUM histories, pointing out the activities that signal the dynamics of the Portuguese-language network within the international sphere. Entitled 'From theory to practice: urban morphology, planning and architecture', his presentation provided a bridge between theoretical discourse concerning urban morphological schools of thought, mainly the Italian and the British ones, and his own practice as an architect in Porto, Portugal.

During the conference, some of the more adventurous participants were taken on an evening guided tour of the historical centre of Vitória. The leaders, Flávia Botecchia, Heraldo Borges and Patrícia Bragatto, led a tour from Costa Pereira Square to a 'happy hour' party at Gama Rosa Street, showing the main architectural and urban landmarks of the genesis, evolution and metamorphosis of the capital city of the Brazilian state of Espírito Santo.

The remarkable organization and the generally high quality of the papers contributed to an event that underlines the maturity of the PNUM conferences, alternately in Brazil and Portugal, amidst very friendly atmospheres. The strict adherence to the schedule, but with informal breaks, facilitated moments of learning, opportunities for sharing and time to relax. The traditional gastronomy, namely the famous *moqueca capixaba*, will have left enjoyable memories for most of those attending.

Jorge Correia, Escola de Arquitetura da Universidade do Minho, Campus de Azurém, 4800-058 Guimarães, Portugal. E-mail: jorge.correia@arquitetura.uminho.pt

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

The Portuguese-language Network of Urban Morphology (PNUM) was engaged in a number of different activities in 2016/17. Its Sixth Conference, on 'Morfologia Urbana: Território, Paisagem e Planeamento' ('Urban morphology: territory, landscape and planning'), took place in Vitória, Brazil, from 24 to 26 August 2017. It was co-ordinated by Prof. Eneida Maria Souza Mendonça and Prof. Milton Esteves Jr, from the Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo. The large majority of participants were from Brazil. This included an unusually large number who were not presenting papers, many of them students and young researchers. This resulted in an encouraging intermixture of generations of researchers, which augurs well for the future of PNUM. A report on this conference is available in this issue of *Urban Morphology*.

The third Workshop promoted by PNUM took place from 4 to 8 September 2017, in Coruna, Spain. Enthusiastically organized by Xosé Lois Martínez, from the Escola Técnica Superior de Arquitectura of the Universidade da Coruna, it benefited from the collaboration of colleagues from Galicia, Portugal and Italy. There were a number of guest lectures. As in the previous PNUM Workshops, there were plenty of opportunities to reflect on the nature of urban form and get to know better the hosted city. A number of lectures, combined with a morphological analysis applied to a specific area of Coruna, provided insights into urban morphological tools for reading the contemporary urban fabric. There was also a comparative perspective on several urban morphological schools of thought, including the historico-geographical and typo-morphological schools. Supported by Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and space syntax, participants had the opportunity to test a

number of types of analysis and compare them in a particular area.

On the publication front, *Revista de Morfologia Urbana*, edited by Vítor Oliveira, is already in its eighth issue, and continues its important role of publishing articles and perspectives in the field. In addition, Portuguese translations of seminal works originally published in English in *Urban Morphology* continue to be made available in *Revista*.

During the 6 years of PNUM's existence it has undergone significant growth in a number of respects: in the number of its members; in the variety of promoted activities; in the geographical environments within which these activities have taken place; and not least in the number of approaches to the study of urban form that have been explored. In this last regard, the PNUM Conference and Workshop proceedings, *Revista*, and the book *O Estudo da Forma Urbana em Portugal* (Oliveira *et al.*, 2015) provide an idea of the rich variety of PNUM's activity.

Nevertheless, the challenges faced are significant. PNUM needs to be alert to innovations as well as continue to nourish its present types of contribution that have proved so successful.

Reference

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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

Reports of ISUF Officers, 2016/17

This report summarizes the matters covered in the reports submitted in September 2017 by the Officers of ISUF and the Webmaster.

President's report

The retiring President, Giancarlo Cataldi welcomed Wendy McClure as the new President. He thanked the members who had completed their

terms on Council (Vicente Colomer, Teresa Marat-Mendes, Marco Maretto, Wendy McClure and Ivor Samuels) and welcomed those who had been newly elected (Vicente Colomer and Giuseppe Strappa), re-elected (Teresa Marat-Mendes) and newly co-opted (Wowo Ding and Irina Kukina). He drew attention to the healthy state of ISUF's affairs and the invaluable contributions of Michael Barke, Kai Gu, Jeremy Whitehand and Susan Whitehand. The

major growth and success of ISUF was attributable in no small part to the contributions of these key members.

Secretary-General's report

The Secretary-General, Kai Gu reported that the final report of the Advisory Committee on the Future Development of ISUF, chaired by Vítor Oliveira, had been circulated. This report proposes the design of a 'road map' for the development of ISUF, 2017–2027. It is based on five main goals: (i) enhancing the organization of ISUF; (ii) strengthening the arenas of debate on urban form; (iii) defining an influential urban morphological agenda; (iv) promoting urban morphology as a field of knowledge; and (v) improving the financial dimension of ISUF.

A matter arising out of the discussions of this committee is the proposal for ISUF to fund research on projects on research and practice that bring together two or more of ISUF's regional networks. Among other proposals under consideration are the possible creation of a new position of Vice-President of ISUF, and the strengthening of relations with the International Society of City and Regional Planners.

Treasurer's report

A very healthy financial position was reported by the Treasurer, Michael Barke. An important element in this was the surpluses generated by conferences. These fortunately helped to meet the rising cost of producing the journal. This meant that ISUF could maintain subscriptions to the journal,

both individual and institutional, at a remarkably low level. It also made it possible to consider proposals for the funding of research and the support of other ISUF initiatives.

Editor's report

The Editor, Jeremy Whitehand expressed his thanks to the retiring members of the Editorial Board, Piper Gaubatz and Feng Song, and welcomed in their place Luna Khirfan and Paul Osmond. He noted that authors continued to be widely spaced geographically, and that the majority of authors in the 2017 volume did not have English as a first language. About 20 per cent of submitted articles were published. In the current volume, the mean time-lag between the receipt of an article from an author and the communication of a decision to that author was just over 3 weeks.

Webmaster's report

A further major increase in usage of the website was reported by the Webmaster, Richard Whitehand. The number of unique 'visits' in 2016/17 was approximately 4500 per month. The conferences section has continued to be the most visited non-journal page. The most downloaded journal articles have averaged over 200 downloads per month in recent years.

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