

Fifth ISUF Italy Conference, Rome, Italy, 19–22 February 2020

The fifth conference of ISUF Italy, on ‘Urban substrata and city regeneration’, took place in the Palazzo Mattei di Giove, in Rome, from 19 to 22 February 2020. The conference was organized by Giuseppe Strappa, Paolo Carlotti, Matteo Ieva, Anna Rita Amato, Antonio Camporeale and Nicola Scardigno. There were three main themes: urban form theory, urban form reading and urban form design.

The first morning of the conference was devoted to the on-going project ‘Emerging Perspectives on Urban Morphology’ / EPUM (<http://epum.eu/>), involving partners from five European countries (including *Sapienza Università di Roma*). The project aims to bring together different morphological approaches through education. The morning included a presentation by the project coordinator, Nadia Charalambous, and a number of invited presentations, by academics not within the project, addressing the main topics of EPUM. While Małgorzata Hanzl, Teresa Marat-Mendes and Nicola Marzot reflected on their teaching experiences in each of the three institutions, Karl Kropf specifically addressed the topic of combining and integrating different approaches in the study of urban form.

The afternoon included a plenary session, followed by a round table, on the dynamic relations

between archaeology and architecture. Alessandra Capuano, Paolo Carafa and Alexander Schwarz discussed the different perspectives of the subject, including the misunderstandings that explain the current gap between the two fields, the fundamental debate on what to conserve and what to transform, and the possibility of exploring the idea of building as process (at the core of the process typological approach) as a common ground for the two fields.

The second day of the conference included eight parallel sessions (with a total of 58 presentations), on the three main themes of the conference. Topics of presentation and discussion included the role of urban morphology in the description and explanation of historical contexts, the new meanings of urban substrata (including the remarkable presentations by Marco Trisciuglio on Nanjing’s urban form and Francesca Geremia on the process of destruction of the San Marco district in Rome), the transformation of urban landscapes, the relation between strategies of reading and design (with a notable presentation on urban morphometrics by Martin Fleischmann), the contribution of urban morphology for the creation of new planning tools, and the relation between urban regeneration and social issues (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Conference session held in the Palazzo Mattei di Giove. Photograph by Matteo Ieva.

The morning of the third day began with presentations relating to a journal and two books. Vítor Oliveira spoke on ‘retail environments’, the new issue of *U+D Urbanform and Design*, the journal of ISUF Italy, which has a distinctive focus on the relation between reading and design. Fabio di Carlo presented Marco Maretto’s new book, *London squares*; which traces the emergence and development of squares as fundamental elements of urban form – Covent Garden to the squares, crescents and circuses designed by John Nash – highlighting their permanence over time. Federica Visconti focused on *Observations on urban growth*, Giuseppe Strappa’s most recent edited book. This covers a number of cities in different continents, analysed not only through the lens of the process typological approach but also of the historico-geographical approach (particularly of the fringe-belt concept).

The morning continued with a session dedicated to the memory of two notable scholars, Gian Luigi Maffei (president of ISUF 2006–2010) and Antonio Monestrioli. Giancarlo Cataldi (president of ISUF 2013–2017), Paolo Vaccaro (in a letter read by Nicola Scardigno), Ivor Samuels and Matteo Ieva remembered not only Maffei’s contribution to the development of the process-typological approach and to the emergence and development of ISUF, but also a number of aspects of his personal life. Similarly, Tomaso Monestiroli, Raffaella Neri and Federica Visconti recalled the contribution of Antonio Monestrioli to architecture in Italy, and particularly to the *Politecnico di Milano*.

The day also included five parallel sessions (totalling 35 presentations) addressing topics such as ancient and new public spaces, re-emerging substrata, continuity and resilience as tools for regeneration, and case studies on the link between reading and design (including the excellent presentation by Gianpiero Moretti on the relationship

between morphological research and architectural practice exemplified by a building in Quebec City). At the end of the afternoon, Paolo Carlotti and Matteo Ieva presented a synthesis of the main topics and the fundamental results of three intense days of morphological sharing.

More than any other regional/national networks of ISUF, the conferences of the Italian chapter of the International Seminar on Urban Form have been able to attract a large number of overseas participants. This includes a strong link between ISUF Italy and the Chinese Network of Urban Morphology / CNUM (see, for instance, the project on research and practice funded by ISUF and developed by *Sapienza Università di Roma* and Nanjing University). This year, due to the Covid-19 outbreak, a number of Chinese colleagues were unable to travel to Rome. The conference assembly approved a message of solidarity to CNUM and its members.

The success of the fifth conference of ISUF Italy is evidence of the vitality of ISUF networks. That liveliness is also expressed by the conferences of the Portuguese-language Network of Urban Morphology (PNUM) and of the Hispanic Network of Urban Morphology (ISUF-H) (initially scheduled to take place in Lisbon and in Barcelona later in 2020). It is hoped that these events, together with the Twenty-Seventh ISUF conference, in Salt Lake City – in whatever format the three events are held – will continue to offer urban morphologists a privileged opportunity to debate the fundamental themes of urban form and of the agents and processes of transformation that shape our cities.

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PNUM: ten years after

It has been ten years since I had the pleasure of presenting a proposal to the ISUF Council, in the Hamburg conference of 2010, to establish a Portuguese Network of Urban Morphology (PNUM). A paper published at the time, on the study of urban form in Portugal, reported the development of many research projects – mainly taken in isolation – and also the lack of internationalization of Portuguese urban morphology (Oliveira

et al., 2011). Since then, PNUM has expanded from a ‘Portuguese’ to a ‘Portuguese-language’ network, embracing Brazil, it has effectively contributed to the promotion of the study of urban form in the two countries, and it has strengthened the relation of Portuguese-language urban morphologists to members of ISUF and of other regional networks.

One of the main activities of PNUM over the last decade has been the organization of annual

conferences. Nine conferences, six in Portugal and three in Brazil, have been organized since the first gathering in Porto, back in 2011, under the coordination of Mário Fernandes. I would highlight two of these events. In 2014, in Porto, we organized the annual conference of the International Seminar on Urban Form. It was the first ISUF conference to take place in Portugal and the second in a Portuguese-language country after the successful conference in Ouro Preto, in 2007, coordinated by Stael Pereira Costa. Porto 2014 has, so far, been the largest ISUF conference with almost 400 presentations (from an initial set of 550 submissions), organized in ten tracks under the general theme ‘Our common future in urban morphology’. In 2019 we met in the garden city of Maringá, in southern Brazil. ‘Urban form and nature’, coordinated by Renato Leão Rego, took place in late August, and attracted a large participation of researchers (more than 400 submissions), mostly Brazilians, many of whom were students. Participants came from 16 of the 26 states of the country. For the reports on these two conferences see Morley (2014) and Meneguetti (2019).

Another fundamental element of PNUM is the *Revista de Morfologia Urbana* (<http://revistademorfologiaurbana.org/index.php/rmu>). The *Revista* began publication in 2013 with close links with *Urban Morphology* and benefiting from the advice of its then editor, Jeremy Whitehand, and associate editors, Karl Kropf and Peter Larkham. The *Revista* is published in Portuguese, with two issues per year. Since early 2019 it has been edited by Julio Vargas, Renato Saboya and Vinicius Netto. The most recent issue, published in December 2019, includes 12 papers and six perspectives. All of the perspectives are dedicated to Bill Hillier, who died in November 2019, and whose work has influenced so many of the authors and the readers of our journal.

Finally, the last key event of the network is the annual workshops, which began in 2015. The main goal of each one-week event is to move from the theoretical and conceptual debate promoted in conferences to effective methodological and technical experiment. The different approaches in urban morphology, the interaction between nature and urban form, and the relation between scientific research and professional practice have been the main themes of these workshops, which have taken place in Porto, Vila Nova de Cerveira, Coruña (in conjunction with our Spanish colleagues) and Maringá. It should be noted that two of these workshops had the active support

of Giuseppe Strappa; first in Porto 2015, through links with the 22nd ISUF conference in Rome, and secondly in Coruña 2017, through teaching of the process typological approach.

In 2015 a book on the study of urban form in Portugal was published, with the participation of the founding members of PNUM and offering a national portrait of this field of knowledge (Oliveira *et al.*, 2015). In 2020, a special number of the journal *Urbe* is devoted to the study of urban form in Brazil, with the participation of some of the main Brazilian researchers in urban morphology (including contributions by Renato Saboya, Renato Leão Rego and colleagues, Frederico de Holanda, Ana Claudia Cardoso and colleagues, Eugenio Queiroga and Francine Sakata, and Evandro Monteiro and colleagues, which are already uploaded online at the time of writing, at https://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_issuetoc&pid=2175-336920200001&lng=en&nrm=iso).

Since August 2010, PNUM has grown from a small initiative of 15 researchers to an established network for the scientific study of the physical form of cities. The world has also changed over this decade. Yet the most dramatic transformation has taken place in the last few months, with the COVID-19 pandemic. This has changed each and every aspect of our daily lives. For PNUM it means an additional challenge in our strategy for the coming years, notably in strengthening the relations with our colleagues in Mozambique, extending to Africa the fraternal relationship between Southern Europe and Latin America.

References

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