

Why *Urban Morphology*?

The study of settlement forms has had a presence in academic journals at least since the end of the nineteenth century. Among geographers writing journal articles on the subject have been such luminaries as O. Schlüter (note 1) and H.J. Fleure (note 2). That the study of urban settlement forms has not previously had a particular journal exclusively devoted to it, at least in the English language, is attributable in part to the way in which knowledge has been compartmentalized. Most scholars and researchers who have devoted energy to the subject have had allegiance to an established academic discipline or field of professional practice. Hence research on urban areas as physical entities is scattered widely in the journals and other publications of particular disciplines and professions, including architecture, town planning, geography, history and archaeology. Why then, some one hundred years on, create a journal devoted to the field?

Central to the answer to this question is growing evidence, especially in the past 15 years, that scholarly interest in settlement forms generally, and urban settlement forms in particular, is much more widespread than those working in the field, often in comparative isolation from one another, had realized. Such interest exists among scholars not only working in a number of different disciplines, but scattered widely across the world. The geographical compass and interdisciplinary nature of this interest came into focus with the bringing together of a group of scholars, researchers and practitioners from several disciplines and countries in a series of annual meetings in Lausanne in the mid-1990s. It quickly became evident that this group, now formally constituted as the International Seminar on Urban Form, and the national and disciplinary constituencies from which it sprang, required more efficient communication between annual meetings if it were to achieve its principal aim of advancing international and interdisciplinary research. It was apparent to a number of members of the group that the creation of a periodical devoted to this field of knowledge was an important step if the field were to advance in a more concerted manner, with new research building upon, rather than standing alongside of, the old.

It is already clear that, even by the standards of international scholarly organizations, the basic task of promoting awareness of the research that is being, and has already been, undertaken, often by individuals working essentially alone, is formidable. Most international organizations of scientists and social scientists, if not those in the humanities, start from a large basis of shared experience. In contrast, many settlement studies are viewed by their authors as intrinsically local. The scope for comparisons within countries, let alone between culture areas, has often gone unrecognized. Furthermore, in bridging from the most quantitative extremes of the social sciences to the most qualitative of the arts and humanities, those researching into what has become widely, but not universally, known as 'urban morphology' encounter differing norms of communication. For many academic architects, for example, contributing to a learned journal is a relatively rare event, whereas for geographers it is an integral part of their professional lives.

But, if geographical and disciplinary barriers to communication are large, those of language are arguably larger. Whereas in the sciences, the English language has for many years been the overwhelmingly dominant medium of communication, a very large majority of settlement studies are published in the first language of the author, frequently a language read by only a minority, sometimes a tiny minority, of those researching the same, or a similar, topic in a different geographical area. The problems of a lack of standard terminology within areas sharing the same language are thus greatly exacerbated when communication is attempted across language divides.

But perhaps the greatest challenge of all that faces researchers striving to build intellectual bridges, and hence central to the purpose of this journal, is to reconcile, or at least clarify the distinctions between, different conceptual frameworks. Two independently derived frameworks have already played major parts in the deliberations of the International Seminar: that of the Conzenian School which has been influential among geographical urban morphologists in the United Kingdom and that of the Caniggian School, with its following of Italian architects. The importance of the first of these is recognized in the dedication of this inaugural issue of *Urban Morphology* to the founding father of the Conzenian School, M.R.G. Conzen, on the occasion of his ninetieth birthday. The significance of the second is reflected in the devotion of the greater part of this issue's discussion section, 'Viewpoints', to differing views on the Caniggian School.

Both these schools of thought will no doubt be the subject of attention in subsequent issues, although submitted, rather than commissioned, manuscripts will form the main basis for determining the contents of the journal. As in

this issue, it is intended that the journal will fully reflect both its interdisciplinary and international objectives. While most articles will necessarily be concerned with geographically localized places, they will deal with, or at least demonstrate connections to, matters of more general significance. Contributions that seek to build bridges across disciplinary, geographical and language boundaries will be particularly welcome.

Notes

1. Schlüter, O. (1899) 'Bemerkungen zur Siedlungsgeographie', *Geographische Zeitschrift* 5, 65-84.
2. Fleure, H.J. (1920) 'Some types of cities in temperate Europe', *Geographical Review* 10, 357-74.

J.W.R. Whitehand