

Il faut tourner la page

The sense of exhilaration about the development of ISUF in 1997 has been widely shared. The quantitative expansion has been remarkable enough (134 people registered for the Conference in Birmingham in July), but the extent of the geographical reach, growing from a largely European core to a practically worldwide spread across some 30 countries, and the range of disciplines involved (from archaeology and history to architecture, city planning and geography), have been even more significant.

Two priorities are clear. The first is to ensure that organizational structures are in place that enable creative energies to be applied to best effect. This process, begun in Lausanne in 1996, was carried forward in 1997. At the General Meeting, held at the Conference in Birmingham, new administrative arrangements and offices were created to accord with the increased size and diversity of ISUF, Anne Vernez Moudon moving from the position of Secretary-General to become President and Michaël Darin becoming Secretary-Treasurer. The approved constitution has been circulated, with this issue of *Urban Morphology*, to all paid-up members. Other arrangements approved at the General Meeting are reported on page 19 and the President's Report, containing a wide-ranging agenda for ISUF, appears on pages 8-10.

The second priority, also referred to by the President, concerns the very substance, activity and underpinning of urban morphology itself. Having developed largely independently within several different disciplines, and been subject not only to the barriers between those disciplines but to major linguistic divides, its institutionalization in ISUF is helping to bring into focus philosophical and methodological problems that are adding up to a formidable challenge ahead. Meeting this challenge involves tackling two interrelated kinds of issues.

First, there are primarily matters of mutual understanding between what have hitherto functioned as essentially separate schools of thought within their own linguistic and conceptual worlds. If we are to take advantage of the opportunities that ISUF is creating we must at the very least seek to understand one another's purposes and scientific vocabularies; the preparation of a glossary of technical terms (Nasr, 1997) and systematic comparisons of research in different traditions are important ways of achieving this (see, for example, Marzot, pp. 54-5, of this issue).

Secondly, there are fundamental ideas, relating not only to the purpose and methods of urban morphology but to the processes underlying urban form itself. These not only transcend schools of thought within urban morphology, but stimulate links with other fields of knowledge. In 'facing up to evolution', Karl Kropf and Sylvain Malfroy (this issue, pp. 45-50) lead us to ponder the very nature of change, at least within the geosphere, and the importance of an awareness of other, especially biological, sciences. These are very general questions indeed. They are cross-disciplinary, and in an era of unprecedented specialization, remind us of the crucial, yet oft forgotten, need for integration in all things.

Though we should be in no doubt about the intellectual demands that this places upon us, we should also take encouragement from the fact that, in the search for integrative theoretical frameworks, much has already been achieved. Such luminaries as Ernst Neef (1967), as M.R.G. Conzen (1978, p. 13) long ago pointed out, and Torsten Hägerstrand (1991), have in different ways provided invaluable insights and foundations.

Thus, though it might seem at times of greatly heightened interaction, such as has been stimulated by the creation of ISUF, that we are looking in all directions at once and that everything remains to be done, a more reflective stance suggests that existing theory offers powerful navigation aids, even when uncharted waters are being entered. The annals of urban morphology, and of other fields, offer a rich legacy. In moving forward we must put hard-earned assets to good use.

The title of this editorial comment is thus pertinent in two senses. As our new Secretary-Treasurer, Michaël Darin has said, '*il faut tourner la page*'. We need to move on from the small worlds in which we have existed for too long, and create new, larger, more integrated worlds. Yet we need also to turn back to those yellowing pages that have charted ways forward but have remained largely unturned, or turned too quickly, in the past. While endorsing his view, I am mindful of another aphorism: *reculer pour mieux sauter!*

References

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