

Urban morphological classics?

In most fields of knowledge much of what is published achieves almost immediate oblivion, at least if judged by the minimal citation of it in other publications. Less chastening is the fact that a good many monographs and papers are cited for at least a decade, even two or three decades, after publication: they enter the growing reservoir of knowledge, albeit that in the longer term they are seemingly almost forgotten as individual works. In contrast, just a very few publications achieve a kind of immortality: they live on in the citations of succeeding generations of authors, sometimes even receiving increased numbers of citations over time. Which are these exceptional works in urban morphology?

Despite the development of a large body of research on citations, particularly over the past 50 years, urban morphology has been the subject of little scrutiny in these terms. We await the sort of analysis that will reveal whether the longevity of a few of its research publications and the short life of the majority broadly accord with the findings in other fields (see, for example, Meadows, 2004, esp. pp. 605-7). In the meantime it is tempting to begin to reflect on notable contributions to urban morphology made several decades ago that are continuing to influence the subject today. In fact Merlin (1988) provided a snapshot of the views in 1985 of a dozen 'international experts' on contributions to urban morphology, broadly defined, and tabulated the number of their citations of some 50 authors, some already deceased by that time. A quarter of a century on it is of interest to look back at the key publications of some of the authors that were identified in the mid- 1980s and check their previous and more recent citation histories in the ISI Web of Knowledge.

At least three of those authors published the first editions of what are probably their bestknown works at much the same time (Conzen, 1960; Lynch, 1960; Muratori, 1959) and one a few years later (Rossi, 1966). As revealed by the ISI Web of Knowledge, substantially more citations of each of these works have already been made in the 2000s (up to 2008) than in any previous full decade since their publication. This increase is partly a function of the considerable general growth in the number of citing publications over the period being considered. It also reflects changes in the visibility of the works in question associated with the issuing of revised versions and the publication of translations into other languages. However, comparison of their citation histories with those of roughly contemporaneous works does suggest they have exceptional longevity. Over the same period that their citations were increasing substantially those of the monographs by Dickinson (1951), Dyos (1961) and Bobek and Lichtenberger (1966) were decreasing substantially. Of course, comparisons between individual works in different languages in terms of absolute numbers of citations, as distinct from the comparisons of trends being made here, would be misleading owing notably to the fact that the citations compiled in the ISI Web of Knowledge are overwhelmingly in journals published in English.

The variations over time in the extent to which a publication is cited relates to many factors, and there is, no doubt, the stuff here of future contributions to the 'viewpoints' section of this journal. In the case of monographs first published as long ago as the mid-twentieth century, a rising incidence of citation in recent decades invites exploration. With regard to Muratori, there are a good many closely connected scholars referring to his work and that of his immediate successors, with Caniggia's influence being particularly evident. Urban Morphology and ISUF have played a significant part in the recent dissemination of this school of thought. Conzen's work too has been the source of a distinctive approach, providing, like the work of Muratori, one of the bases for the founding of ISUF. While these aspects of the development of urban morphology are, in broad terms, well known to members of ISUF, the all important conceptual relationships involved, and indeed the connections with the thinking of other notable scholars identified in the mid- 1980s, must surely merit prominent places on urban morphology's agenda.

From this glimpse of works that might be considered 'classics' of urban morphology, at least two interrelated matters become apparent as significant challenges for the field. The first entails the ways in which urban morphology is building upon key works that were already seen to be such a quarter of a century ago: in the case of lines of thought pursued by Conzen, two articles in this issue of Urban Morphology (pp. 5-27 and 29-54) set out some of the thinking that is pertinent to finding effective ways forward during the next quartercentury. The second challenge might be seen as an extension of the first: to explore the relationships between the different sorts of thinking that the 'classics' of twentieth-century urban morphology have pursued. Again, this issue of Urban Morphology contains such an attempt (pp. 76-7). The pages of future issues await further responses to these

challenges, not least in relation to ‘classic’ approaches to urban form that have hitherto not been well represented in ISUF.

References

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J.W.R. Whitehand