

## Making connections

When ISUF was founded a central aim was the bringing together of different types of thinking about settlement forms. This journal was conceived as an important part of the means of furthering that aim. Subsequent developments in the study of urban form have not diminished the need for that role. The very nature of the physiognomies of cities means that they are multifaceted and can be studied in a variety of ways. Inevitably, in a field as diverse in its disciplinary origins as urban morphology, a great many papers continue to be published in a wide range of journals, reaching a variety of readerships. While this is thoroughly healthy the need remains undiminished for a journal that provides a forum in which different perspectives and foci meet. And this includes bringing together both the various strands that are inherent in urban form and those connecting it with other phenomena.

Looking back on achievements since the early years of this journal, it is fair to say that collaborations between, on the one hand, the Caniggian/Muratorian architectural school and, on the other, the Conzenian geographical school are now well established (Maffei, 2009; Strappa, 2011). However, despite 18 years of practical collaboration between the two groups, especially in their contributions to the running of ISUF, large gaps remain to be explored if judged by research productivity. This applies to both integrative conceptual development and related empirical studies (Maretto, 2009; Marzot, 2005). Furthermore, of the three language groups that played the most significant roles in ISUF's foundation – English-speaking, Italian-speaking and French-speaking – arguably the last has been the least involved in intellectual exchange over the last few years, some notable individual exceptions notwithstanding (see, for example, Darin, 2010).

There is no doubt that the research links that have been made by ISUF's founders still leave much scope for further development. There are various other connections, some with ramifications well beyond urban morphology, that would benefit from development. Among the more obvious are the relationships between urban morphology and other fields of knowledge in which research dealing with urban form is undertaken. But similarly important are the interrelations of research and practice, and a much wider range of international links.

Perhaps the most notable connections that remain underdeveloped are those between comparable research in different countries and even different parts of the same country. Much to the chagrin of the editors of *Urban Morphology*, there is a seemingly endless flow of submissions of articles whose authors are apparently unaware of the existence of comparable published work that is relevant, sometimes germane, to the topics addressed in their articles. Among the factors underlying this lack of awareness, at least two are striking.

One particularly problematic factor is the extent to which research activity continues to be highly fragmented geographically and linguistically. *Urban Morphology* attempts to alleviate this by keeping readers abreast of relevant publications emanating from different parts of the world, in different languages and disciplines. It does this, for example, through its book reviews and book notes, and its series of articles on the study of urban form in different countries. Nevertheless, much that is relevant goes unnoted in its pages. The referees of articles provide an important service to authors in drawing attention to work comparable to that submitted but, needless to say, the benefits of that advice would be so much greater if it were available to the authors when the research being reported was in its early stages.

The other factor relates more to the underlying philosophy of research: the concern among a significant minority of authors for special cases to the neglect of concepts of wide significance. Yet, if a phenomenon being considered is indeed thought to be exceptional, what better way to seek to establish this than by demonstrating the limitations of more general explanations?

ISUF's search for a solution to the problem of the weak connectedness of researchers has been pursued in various ways additional to the role of this journal. Its annual international conferences have been especially important. The most recent, in Montréal (reported on in pp. 66-8 of this issue), gave more than usual attention to the connections between urban morphology and neighbouring fields of knowledge, including climatology and studies of sustainability, heritage and various other types of investigation relating to the environment. The pursuit of such connections, for example within thematic conference sessions, is a healthy development. In some cases it has

brought to light how little published work exists on the links being explored. There is also scope for submissions of papers to the journal that explore such links, including those between what have been traditionally treated as discrete topics.

From a number of perspectives this issue of the journal might be entitled 'making connections'. Hopkins (pp. 41-54) breaks new ground in his interdisciplinary investigation of the relationship between urban form and ecology. He takes the urban morphological concept of the fringe belt – formulated long ago by Herbert Louis (1936), who was primarily a geomorphologist – and explores statistically its ecological significance, deriving his data from both fieldwork and historical records. Gil et al. (pp. 27-40), in contrast, are concerned with deriving morphological data for the purposes of urban design, though they too adopt a quantitative approach. Morley's perspective (pp. 5-26) is different again. Adopting a qualitative approach, he discusses the interplay of cultural, political, artistic and environmental forces in the creation of American colonial urban form in the previously Spanish-colonial Philippines.

These articles, especially that by Hopkins, are unusual in the degree to which they develop urban morphology's cross-disciplinary linkages. Elsewhere in this issue stress is placed on how much more needs to be done to develop these and other connections, and exemplification is provided of how this can be done. In the viewpoints' section, Samuels (pp. 76-8) focuses on the weak connections between urban designers in America and Europe, despite in many cases their sharing the same first language. He characterizes the problem as being one of 'transatlantic myopia'. However, no doubt he will be glad to see within the same section that He and Henwood (pp. 82-4) demonstrate the application of Western typomorphology to Chinese watertowns, Ley (pp. 78-80) depicts urban morphologists as inherently integrators, and Oliveira and Sousa (pp. 80-82) make the case for strengthening the connections between urban morphological research and planning practice. This last topic was also central to a recent ISUF conference in Birmingham, UK on which Barke reports (pp. 72-3).

It is understandable that most of us find it more comfortable to remain solidly within the confines of not only our particular discipline and subject matter but also within a familiar social, linguistic and methodological milieu. But explorations of connecting links beyond those familiar environs are much needed. And that they can be fruitful is argued and demonstrated in various ways by contributors to this issue.

#### References

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*J.W.R. Whitehand*