

### Bridging the gaps: urban morphology 20 years on

Considerable attention has been drawn over the years to the gaps that exist between the various approaches to urban morphology, and, not least, the gap between urban morphological research and the application of that research, notably in urban planning. The foundation of ISUF was itself an attempt to build bridges between different schools of thought. An attempt to stimulate bridge building between research and planning has more recently been made by the setting up of the ISUF Task Force on Research and Practice (Samuels, 2013). Both these endeavours face major challenges. However, although significant progress is likely to take decades in the case of the latter, there are indications, within ISUF at least, of growing awareness of the opportunities inherent in both of these challenges.

At recent ISUF conferences and in *Urban Morphology*, the need for bridge building has received encouraging amounts of recognition (see, for example, McCormack, 2013). In the case of the gulf between research and practice, inherent in the challenge are the great variations in the conditions that exist in different countries (Song, 2013), with inevitable implications for ways of tackling the problem. Nevertheless, the recent flow of pertinent submissions to this journal is encouraging. Indeed all the articles and Viewpoints in this issue contain explicit references to applications in planning, and in all the articles use is made of a combination of approaches. When *Urban Morphology* began 20 years ago and its aims and those of ISUF were set out, especially regarding the bringing together of different approaches (Moudon, 1997; Whitehand, 1997), such eclecticism was rare.

It is now a matter of history that an increasing number of the journal's authors have taken up the challenge of engaging with different perspectives and methods. As early as the second issue of the journal, discussion had begun, in the Viewpoints section, on the relationship between Conzenian and Caniggian approaches

(Kropf, 1998; Marzot, 1998). Arguably the first of the journal's articles to begin to connect schools of thought was by Darin (2000) in his linking of French belt boulevards to the fringe-belt concept. But in the subsequent decade such attempts were few until the wide-ranging analysis by Kropf (2009) of the spatial analytical, configurational (space syntax), process typological and historicogeographical approaches. Soon after, Griffiths *et al.* (2010) combined Conzenian and space syntax approaches in their study of the persistence of suburban centres in Greater London. Among the notable examples since then is the comparison of four different approaches employed in an area within Porto, Portugal by Oliveira *et al.* (2015).

It is not the result of an editorial strategy that the present issue of the journal brings together contributions that employ combinations of approaches and draw attention to implications for planning practice. As is standard practice in this journal, articles and Viewpoints have been included here according to the date of acceptance of their revised version. It remains to be seen whether in the longer term the contents of this issue reflect a movement towards topics, and particularly combinations of approaches, that were in the early stages of attracting interest 20 years ago when the journal began.

In the first article in this issue (pp. 5–28), Törmä *et al.* build on the project and combination of approaches employed by Griffiths *et al.* (2010). In an examination of two suburban centres, they combine analysis of morphological change, based on a succession of historical cartographic sources, with the use of space syntax to examine the interplay of accessibility and physical form. A principal focus is on the way in which urban form affects the susceptibility of suburban centres to change and the implications of this for their resilience.

This is a very different approach from that adopted in the following article by Jones *et al.* (pp. 29–40). Although here too a series of

cartographic sources is used to reveal physical change over time, it is combined with 'ethnographic approaches', including conventional interviews of inhabitants and walking interviews, employing a specially-written smartphone app. The emphasis is on how people experience their built environment as a place and shape its character in ways that go beyond its physical form and, in this way, contribute to a local plan.

The articles by Kostourou and Karimi (pp. 41–60) and Feliciotti *et al.* (pp. 61–79) are both concerned with aspects of the resilience of urban form. The former focuses on the impact of urban design on the viability of housing developments, examining examples of adjacent areas of nineteenth-century industrial housing and twenty-first century social housing. The latter seeks lessons for planning practice from an examination of the built forms created in the course of the development and two redevelopments of the same area over some 200 years. Analysis in the case of the former relies substantially on space syntax, but 'more qualitative' in-depth interviews with residents are also undertaken. Feliciotti *et al.* assess five proxies of resilience, influenced in part by methods employed in ecology.

While in these articles there are at the very least strong implications for planning practice, in the subsequent Viewpoints (pp. 81–91), including one by a practising urban designer, interrelationships between research and practice are confronted head-on. If this issue of the journal is indicative, there is significant momentum in the impulse to bridge the gaps that have been identified both within urban morphology and between research and practice. As *Urban Morphology* enters its

third decade, it is refreshing to see progress in meeting the challenges identified in general terms 20 years ago. The pages of this journal await evidence of further progress with these endeavours.

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