

### Historical geography, urban morphology and green space

This issue brings together topics that are mostly linked strongly to historical geography. However, rather than being a conscious attempt to explore a theme, it reflects largely the timing of successful submissions to the journal of articles on closely related topics.

Remarkably, at the time of writing this editorial comment, the keyword index of this journal did not contain the words ‘historical geography’, and the term ‘historico-geographical’ occurred only twice. Rather than revealing the proclivities of the journal’s indexer or the editors, perhaps this tells us something about its authors. Do they think of these terms as sufficiently inherent within their subject to render needless much of their *explicit* usage, at least in the choice of keywords? However, the fact that ‘geography’ is frequently recorded as a keyword would seem to shed doubt on this interpretation. What is clearer is that a high proportion of authors of articles in the present issue of this journal have affiliations to geography departments or have geography backgrounds at university level or both. And this almost certainly helps to account for the prominence of some of the perspectives evident in the pages that follow.

In three of the articles a prime focus is the importance of a relatively poorly recognized aspect of urban form – the historical geography of *spaces* as distinct from structures. In other articles a historico-geographical perspective is prominent throughout or implicit in significant parts.

The relatively low level of recognition given to spaces in urban morphology (Lee, 1999) is particularly evident in the case of green spaces. These have attracted the attention of ecologists in recent decades, but rarely in relation to the development of the *historico-geographical* configurations of cities. In this issue (pp. 5–44) some progress is made in rectifying this deficiency within urban morphology, albeit sometimes consisting of the identification of gaps in knowledge rather than going far in filling them.

A major focus of attention is the place of fringe belts in the creation and adaptation of green-space zones within cities. Those fringe belts with the deepest *historical* roots mostly originate as open areas next to defensive walls around cities. In the process of subsequent urban growth the embedment of these green areas leads to them separating older from younger parts of the urban area. This has frequently entailed a number of types of survival and adaptation of various kinds of green zones separating the more built-up parts of urban areas. More common in present-day cities, however, are less-continuous fringe belts comprising land uses with high proportions of green space that have formed at urban fringes during extended periods of slow growth of residential areas, particularly associated with slumps in housebuilding. Both types of fringe-belt formation and their changes over time give rise to distributional patterns highly relevant to urban planning, though this has hitherto been insufficiently acknowledged.

In contrast, the historical geography of urban *physical* structures has been much more widely explored and this too is discussed in this issue. One aspect to have attracted considerable research, particularly since the groundbreaking contribution of M. R. G. Conzen (1960), is town-plan analysis. However, rarely has a challenge to widely accepted findings on this aspect of urban morphology been as conspicuous as it has very recently in this journal. It came from a standpoint much closer to urban history than urban morphology, and it has provoked controversy and been subjected to a substantial critique in this issue (pp. 59–68).

Controversy may also be generated by the argument that Spanish urban morphology has been relatively isolated until recent years, despite the prolific writing on Spanish history that there has been over many years (pp. 45–58). The proponent of this argument presents data showing that, even at the recent ISUF conference in Spain, studies by

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Spanish participants of topics that tend to be characterized by historico-geographical urban morphology were proportionately fewer than studies of these topics by other participants. It remains to be seen whether this contribution too will stimulate further discussion in *Urban Morphology*.

At the much smaller geographical scale of Cyprus, the influences on the recent rapid growth of urban morphology as a subject of research have been far from indigenous; and these too are clearly evident in this issue (pp. 69–82). In the case of the historico-geographical and configurational approaches pursued in Cyprus, links to work in the UK have been prominent. This international perspective is reflected in the choice of Cyprus's capital, Nicosia as the location of the forthcoming ISUF conference (p. 44).

It remains to be seen whether the gathering of urban morphologists in Cyprus leads

to further debates on controversies that seem to be emerging in the pages of this journal: whether it be about the place of urban greenery, the foundations of town-plan analysis, or how up-to-date we are on developments in our field. And, perhaps needless to add, the pages of the Viewpoints section of *Urban Morphology* are ready and waiting for contributions on these and many other topics.

### References

- Conzen, M. R. G. (1960) *Alnwick, Northumberland: a study in town-plan analysis* Institute of British Geographers Publication 17 (George Philip, London).
- Lee, K. C. (1999) 'How we view cities', *Urban Morphology* 3, 51–3.

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