Editorial comment

ISUF and *Urban Morphology*: 25 years on and counting

It is a quarter of a century since the International Seminar on Urban Form (ISUF) began to take shape. Though as a field of knowledge urban morphology has existed since the nineteenth century, in the past 25 years it has grown to an extent and in ways that perhaps few of ISUF's founder members would have anticipated. It is timely to reflect on this development, both historically and in considering opportunities for further growth and change.

It was in 1994 in Lausanne, Switzerland that a group of twenty academics and practitioners with a professional interest in urban form gathered around a large table and began to share their interests and discuss the scope for international co-operation. Five countries were represented: France, Great Britain, Italy, Switzerland and the United States. Architects were the most numerous participants, followed by smaller groups of geographers, urbanists and planners. Since urban morphology had already existed as a field of knowledge within Europe for over a century, the predominance of European representatives was not surprising. However, the absence of representation of the German-speaking world, where much of the pioneering work in urban morphology had been undertaken in the nineteenth century and the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, was perhaps surprising.

Most of those present would probably agree that the discussions that occurred at that first meeting were quite stimulating, albeit that viewed with the hindsight of 25 years they might seem somewhat limited in both breadth and depth. The name initially adopted by the group was International Seminar of Urban Morphology (ISUM), but by the second meeting, which like the first and third meetings was also held in Lausanne, the present name of International Seminar on Urban Form (ISUF) was adopted, a change particularly argued for by the Italian representatives.

ISUF's place in the subsequent growth of urban morphology is reflected in growing participation in its annual conferences, the growth of this journal, and particularly the proliferation of regional, mainly national, groups. At the initial meeting in Lausanne most of the printed papers had been available only in the first language of the author, and the consequent mixture of languages remained a feature of the subsequent two meetings. However, it was agreed at the second meeting that, particularly to facilitate participation by contributors from Asia, English translations of all presentations needed to be available and all discussions should be in English. The idea of publishing a journal had been scarcely a twinkling of an eye at the initial meeting. But within another year *Urban Morphology* was already in the making, and there was little opposition to the proposal that it should be published in English. Nevertheless, it soon became evident that a minority of the authors of articles had English as their first language.

Meanwhile, beyond ISUF, published references to 'urban morphology' were entering a period of major growth. Remarkably, the Web of Science was to record over the next 25 years a more than fortyfold increase in its annual counts of the occurrence of "urban morphology" in its 'Core Collection'. However, circumspection is necessary in assessing the significance of such measures of growth. Most obviously, the number of publications indexed in the Web of Science has grown greatly, with inevitable effects on the incidence of terms. Potentially more confusing are the different connotations of the term 'urban morphology': while strictly it means the *study* of urban form, it is frequently misused as a synonym for 'urban form', as Larkham (2002, pp. 95–7) has cautioned.

Similar to other social science journals, there has been a marked tendency in *Urban Morphology* over the past 20 years for multi-authorship and, to a lesser extent, multi-national authorship to increase. Multidisciplinary authorship has also increased but, bearing in mind the inherently multidisciplinary character of urban morphology,

  ISSN 1027–4278

this tendency has not been as great as might have been anticipated. In view of the strong interdisciplinary impetus in the formation of ISUF (Moudon, 1997), it is perhaps surprising that over the past 10 years the proportion of articles in *Urban Morphology* in which researchers from different disciplines have co-authored has exceeded 20 per cent in only 1 year. Nevertheless, there have been notable attempts by individual authors to explore interdisciplinary links (Kropf, 2009; Oliveira *et al*., 2015). The almost entirely separate schools of thought associated with the British geographer M. R. G. Conzen and the Italian architect Saverio Muratori in the pre-ISUF era have perhaps provided the beginnings of one of the more fruitful explorations of interdisciplinary communication since the formation of ISUF (Maffei and Whitehand, 2001). Unfortunately, the development of links between research and practice has on the whole been weak, including in the field of heritage (Ehlers, 2018).

The linking of different perspectives and approaches, including at the research-practice interface, has, despite its limited extent, arguably been one of the more important developments in urban morphology within the span of ISUF's history. Though predominantly dependent on English as a lingua franca, it is one of the more significant opportunities for future developments in urban morphology.

As we look forward into the second quarter-century of ISUF, forecasting is particularly difficult in a field in which developments are so interwoven with those in various disciplines: in the past, changes occurring in architecture, geography and planning have tended to be among the more influential. However, from another standpoint it is appropriate to note here significant changes now occurring within ISUF itself, since these are especially relevant to the immediate future of this journal.

Hitherto, *Urban Morphology* has been guided by the same team of Editor and Associate Editors. As from the next issue, one of the Associate Editors, Peter Larkham will become Editor. Karl Kropf will continue as an Associate Editor, and Vítor Oliveira, Secretary-General of ISUF, who is a native Portuguese speaker but fluent in English, will join him as an Associate Editor.

The task ahead is considerable, but these leaders of the new editorial team have outstanding records within urban morphology, including significant experience within more than one discipline and in both research and practice. All have had major roles in the development of ISUF, two of them throughout its entire history. They are especially well placed to guide this journal at its present stage of development: all strength to them and the editorial team as a whole as they move into the next quarter century!

References

Ehlers, E. (2018) 'Globalization, UNESCO, urban morphology and local responses', *Urban Morphology* 22, 101–8.

Kropf, K. (2009) 'Aspects of urban form', *Urban Morphology* 13, 105–20.

Larkham, P. J. (2002) 'Misusing 'morphology'?', *Urban Morphology* 6, 95–7.

Maffei, G. L. and Whitehand, J. W. R. (2001) 'Diffusing Caniggian ideas', *Urban Morphology* 5, 47–8.

Moudon, A. V. (1997) 'Urban morphology as an emerging interdisciplinary field', *Urban Morphology* 1, 3–10.

Oliveira, V., Monteiro, C. and Partanen, J. (2015) 'A comparative study of urban form', *Urban Morphology* 19, 73–92.

J. W. R. Whitehand