

Twenty-First International Seminar on Urban Form, Porto, Portugal, 3-6 July 2014

At the closing ceremony of the Twenty First International Seminar on Urban Form, ISUF President Giancarlo Cataldi (University of Florence) remarked on the globalized nature of the organization. With participants in Porto heralding from Asia, Australasia, Europe, and North and South America, he highlighted how urban morphological study, whilst frequently emphasizing local urban structures and evolutions, had in recent years grown to such an extent that its international range was unequivocal.

Attracting speakers from almost 50 countries, ISUF 2014 was opened by presentations by two researchers associated with urban studies at the University of Porto, Vítor Oliveira and Paulo Pinto. Together revealing the historical and contemporary transformations of Porto following its Roman

origins, they revealed to a large audience (Figure 1) the ‘metabolism’ of the city, and how its form, function, built fabric and history have become intimately entwined as Porto evolved to become Portugal’s second largest city. The subsequent plenary session comprised papers on different approaches to the study of urban form, presented by Jeremy Whitehand (University of Birmingham), Jürgen Lafrenz (University of Hamburg), Giancarlo Cataldi, and Bill Hillier (University College London). Issues such as cityscape management, the form of the cultural landscape, spatial formation, and relationships between urban structure, function and theory were explored (Figure 2): all of these were topics that were further addressed in numerous papers as the conference unfolded.

There were many speakers from Brazil and



Figure 1. Part of the large audience at the opening session of the conference. Photograph by Ana Natalio.



Figure 2. The discussion on different approaches to the study of urban form. Photograph by Cláudia Monteiro.

Portugal, and considerable attention was given during the conference to such topics as Portuguese and Brazilian typomorphology, urban plans, and urban thinkers and ideology. Stael Alvaranga de Pereira Costa (University of Minas Gerais) and Teresa Marat-Mendes (Lisbon University Institute) discussed the need to be fully alert to the development of urban knowledge and intellectual paradigms, so as to classify built environments and the processes that affect their form. In the case of rural Portugal, Marat-Mendes examined the union between geography, geology and culture in the design, evolution and classification of house types. Politics and power as agents greatly affecting how urban space can be created and laced with distinct meaning were noted by many scholars within the Portuguese speaking-world and beyond. Pelin Özden (Istanbul University) considered political attitudes to planning in Istanbul, and Joyce Silva, an employee of Sao Paulo City, gave insights into the creation and implementation of a new master plan within Brazil's largest city. In contrast Paulo Silva (University of Aveiro) drew attention to the topics

of governance and citizen activism by showing how the re-use of urban spaces enables citizens to 'intervene' in the formation of the built character of cities.

Urban layering was a theme that recurred in many presentations. Ayşe Kubat (Istanbul Technical University) highlighted how different political and cultural circumstances have left marks on the built fabric of Istanbul. Such a theme, often with regard to landscape and traditional culture, was also evident in papers by Chinese contributors and papers concerned with the Middle East, and no doubt will be prominent at the ISUF conference to be held in Nanjing, China, in 2016.

Whilst the majority of conference participants were academics, the topic of planning practice was addressed by a number of speakers. Karl Kropf (Built Form Resource and Oxford Brookes University) described an ISUF-funded project to establish a repository of urban tissue. Seeking to identify core attributes within various urban places that could, for example, facilitate the use of urban morphology as a tool to help urban planners more



Figure 3. Ivor Samuels introducing the plenary session on research and practice. Photograph by Pedro Oliveira.

effectively create policy, Kropf welcomed feedback on the implementation of the project.

The final plenary session, conceived and introduced by Ivor Samuels (University of Birmingham) (Figure 3), explored how urban morphological research can contribute to planning practice. The papers by members of the ISUF Task Force on research and practice were well received. Unfortunately there was limited time available for contributions from the floor on how urban morphology as a distinct intellectual tool currently influences 'real world' urban design practice and how it should do so in the future. The explanation by Vítor Oliveira of historical core integrity in Porto, and by Michael Barke (University of Northumbria) of challenges in relation to property character and ownership in Newcastle, UK provided most appropriate bases for discussion. The explanation of house typology in Gujarat, India by Nicola Scardigno (Roma Tre University), and the account of use and perception of local design character in Alpine France by Laurence Pattacini (University of Sheffield) offered further opportunities for exploring how academia and real world practice could be more effectively united. As Barke and Samuels noted, how urban morphological research is presented is likely to have a significant effect on its adoption as a

planning tool.

This highly successful conference, for which much praise is due to the Organizing Committee, witnessed two important landmarks: the formal recognition of the work of Jeremy Whitehand on urban morphology, as shown through the publication of a new book; and the creation of the Porto Charter, a draft document clarifying for a wider audience the aims of urban morphology from the perspective of ISUF. The Charter is likely to provide the basis for future discussion in *Urban Morphology*.

Judging by this conference, the omens for ISUF are good. The agenda is broad and challenging, including the place of urban morphology in education, the links between different approaches, and the relationship between research and practice. These, and doubtless many other topics, will be further explored in the conferences in 2015 and 2016, in Rome and Nanjing.

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