**BOOK REVIEWS**


The Latvian capital Riga has been blessed with a little gem of its own: the book *Riga beyond the walls*. This book is special in the sense that the city’s emergence, development and change is shown mainly by using maps and city plans. It describes not only the appearance and transformation of streets and blocks but discusses also new ideas related to town planning, and makes comparisons with the design of contemporary major European cities. The town layout was shaped by fortification requirements and other needs which affected the street layout, the size and shape of blocks, and their parcellation (subdivision into individual plots). Later the railways, additional types of buildings, and thereafter parks and avenues were introduced as city-forming elements.

*Riga beyond the walls* can be said to be a twin of the book *Landerierna i Göteborgs stadsbyggnade* (Enhörning, 2006), which uses maps and city plans to show the Swedish city of Gothenburg’s transformation and planned expansion over 300 years, from its foundation until the 1920s. As the subtitle reveals, *Riga beyond the walls* deals with the city’s planned growth and transformation from the seventeenth century to the First World War. The city’s extension beyond its core proceeded through successive, comprehensive plans – much like Gothenburg’s.

The first chapter, ‘17th century urban development’, considers Riga under Swedish rule. During much of this time Sweden was at war with Poland and Russia. The prime issue concerning Riga, as the authors note, was defence: building fortifications and the continuous redevelopment of them. Of note too, a spontaneous development of suburbs took place, but no plan was composed for these until the 1650s when a suburban street network and fortifications outside the suburbs were introduced.

In the following chapter, ‘18th century urban development’, Bākule and Siksna explain the impact of Russian rule upon Riga (lasting until 1917). Riga, we are told, was affected by the Great Northern War, which severely damaged its fortifications, buildings and suburbs, and then by a plague. Rebuilding of the city and suburbs took 50 years. A wide, clear defensive area beyond the fortifications, a so-called esplanade, was established. In the first half of the eighteenth century a large number of regularly planned gardens, perhaps associated with small summer houses, were created. As many of the suburban lots were quite large, much of the suburban area was characterized by houses set in gardens and greenery (pp. 99-100).

The third chapter deals with urban development in the first half of the nineteenth century. It draws attention to the suburbs being destroyed by fire in 1812, and their redevelopment: a fan-shaped street network and new public squares were built. Tree-lined walkways, *allées*, connected the suburbs with the city core, a public park was established, and for the first time the influence of the railway could be felt in the city.

In the fourth chapter, on ‘Urban development in the second half of the 19th century’, analysis of the industrial revolution and population increase are described. The historic fortifications were torn down – considerably later than in many other European cities – and a plan was made by J. D. Felsko (in co-operation with O. Dietze) in accord with modern European ideals. This plan (of 1857) was very progressive for its time and shows parallels with the first plan of Gothenburg (1866), which was the first plan in Sweden to emanate from a public town planning competition. Both plans

tried to fulfil modern ideals regarding park belts, boulevards, round-points (‘star places’), allées, villa developments, and public buildings. Unfortunately the Felsko plan in Riga was revised and simplified. However, Felsko was City architect over a long period, so many of his intentions were realized.

The final chapter, on the morphology of building types, focuses on what is today Old Riga. Just as in Gothenburg and a number of other cities, all buildings in the area had to be made of wood in case the city was attacked and structures had to be destroyed in the face of the enemy. Later, new buildings, often stone-built ones, were erected. In the eighteenth century the wealthy inhabitants of the inner city wanted to take advantage of the possibilities of suburban life, since life inside the fortifications was unhealthy: ‘people wished to build small out-of-town residences in the environs of Riga, placed within extensive gardens and reached via long avenues. These residences developed as assemblages of buildings around small mansions’ (p. 195). After the fire of 1812 the suburbs were rebuilt using ‘model façades’ (approved by Russia). New building regulations came, and there was a rapid change in the suburbs as both density and number of storeys increased. The status of the area changed too. The transformation of the former territory of the fortifications and esplanade into the urban centre became complete during the 1880s.

Riga beyond the walls is attractively designed and has a very convenient format. It is richly illustrated with 98 pictures, many of these in colour. The quality of the illustrations is, on the whole, exceptionally good, but sometimes an original was not in good condition, like the Felsko/Dietze plan (pp. 152-3). Sometimes too the digitization of plans is unsatisfactory – for example that of the city plan of 1770 (pp. 84-5). This is a book for those who admire old maps and buildings. It benefits greatly from a remarkable bringing together of archive material, not only from Latvia but also Russia and Sweden. With parallel texts in Latvian and English, this work will surely be acknowledged not only by Latvians, especially citizens of Riga, but by a wider group of international scholars and discerning heritage tourists.

Reference

commonly employed for place branding and commodification, a phenomenon observed worldwide and powered by hypercapitalism. While similar social issues, such as gentrification and stratification, are observed in China, the Chinese pursuit of globalization differs from its Western counterparts owing to the particular power geography in current society, as Ren vividly explains. A comparative perspective is often offered in the three case studies to clarify similarities and differences of various social phenomena in the Chinese and Western contexts. At the end, it is suggested that the current spatial strategies in Chinese cities produce ‘vast discontent and inequality’ (p. 177). For audiences who are interested in postmodern urbanism, post-industrial regeneration and globalization, this book provides important local insights that are relevant to the study of the global urban future.

Building globalization pays attention to the searching for national identity by China’s urban elites and the state party in the global context at a critical moment of history. It reminds Chinese citizens of a similar attempt pursued by the first generation of Chinese architects and social elites under passive Western influences in the early-twentieth century (Esherick, 1999). The question of what is Chinese has always been controversial and changeable. In relation to the current debate, the idea of Critical Architecture is reintroduced, which should challenge current ideology and social injustice in China. For an architectural audience, Ren poses an essential concern for the social responsibility of the profession in the market-driven environment. National identity does not only lie in the image representation of architecture, but also in socially responsive spaces that support the wellbeing of all social classes. The debate on eye-catching shapes or ‘traditional skins’ of architecture is rather superficial. More consideration needs to be given to the social dimension. This point of view echoes Cuthbert’s (2007) claim that the design profession should engage with solid theory, linking sociology, geography, and economics for instance, so that urban form, meaning, and function are embraced in design as well as context. In this respect, for decision-makers, the choice over domestic or reputable international architects should not be driven by either conservative nationalism or global liberalism, but by creating socially sustainable spaces for Chinese citizens.

From the urban design point of view, current practices by the new generation of Chinese architects and planners are sophisticated in the generation of forms, but lack understanding of the social foundations. This book offers good practice that potentially has wide applicability to help tackle issues of social sustainability in design processes. However, this advantage is limited, since the book is structured in terms of individual urban projects and lacks a consistent conceptual framework to map complex social relations. Ideas are introduced and independent arguments are stated regarding each project, which weakens the main argument and is an obstacle to further exploration. Furthermore, the book does not discuss how architectural images of the three projects are deliberately created and remotely consumed through the media by world consumers, thus failing to strengthen the idea of the symbolic power of architecture.

References


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This is a considerably slimmer volume than most that reach a scholarly bookshelf today, and leaves us wishing for more. Few observers, scholarly or otherwise, of New Delhi’s planning and civic shortcomings would disagree with the title and hypothesis of Gupta’s work. It is a praiseworthy effort, seeking to go beyond existing scholarship to examine in detail various spatial issues associated with British imperialism and its post-colonial Indian context, both in terms of design and meaning. But much more remains to be done.

Early on, Anubhav Gupta quotes the descriptions of Delhi by two of its most famous residents, Mirza Ghalib and Khushwant Singh (p. 33). Their contrasting views serve as bookends to
his quest for why New Delhi’s planning made it so out of touch with citizenry needs, both in British India and as capital of present-day India. Mirza Asadullah Ghalib, South Asia’s beloved poet, lived in Delhi from 1810 until his death in 1897. He missed, by a few years, the foundation of New Delhi in 1911 as the seat of the Viceregal government. Ghalib grew to manhood in a late-Mughal Delhi that had borne successive vicissitudes. But under the penultimate Mughal Emperor and the British Raj, the city recovered some prosperity and security, prompting Ghalib’s comparison of Delhi to the pure soul of the world. More than a century later, yet another raconteur, Khushwant Singh, lived in Delhi. He was the son of Sir Sobha Singh, the contractor who built much of New Delhi. Khushwant Singh’s magnum opus, at the end of a long writing career, was a Rabelaisian novel in which he characterized Delhi as a beloved, aged-and-diseased ravaged mistress.

It is unfortunate that the colourful history and politics that lie in-between Ghalib and Singh’s oeuvres, almost 4 centuries of documented urban planning from Mughal to British to a post-colonial metropole, have not provided a more successful frame for Gupta’s subject. His negative characterization of ‘the Mughal occupation of India’ (p. 17) is a fundamental and alarming misunderstanding of the city’s, and India’s early modern history. Gupta elides the Delhi of Ghalib and Singh for a narrower focus on the plan of imperial ‘Rome’ that the British built as their capital of New Delhi. He marshals a number of urban theorists, from his mentor Laurence Vale to Narayani Gupta and Robert Irving, to prove his hypothesis of New Delhi’s continuance as an imperial urban artifact of British colonialism, unresponsive and even obstructive to post-colonial India’s demographic and urban concerns. He seeks the reasons why, in Vale’s words, New Delhi remains a type of overgrown capital complex, resolutely detached from the rest of the city. The tripartite scheme of needs that New Delhi perforce serves in post-colonial India – that of a ceremonial precinct, an elite residential enclave, and a central business district – goes far and yet not far enough.

In the first half of the book, Gupta summarizes scholarship on the well-known story of the building of imperial New Delhi and its imagination as the modern era’s New Rome. He discusses how the imperial planning and evolution of British Delhi intentionally segregated what Anthony King called ‘the colonial urban settlement’ from ‘the native city’ and how, a century later, that segregation of rulers and ruled continued apace. The huge influx of refugees into Delhi after the hasty partitioning of British India into the sovereign nations of India and Pakistan in 1947 led to the new Indian state adopting piecemeal measures to cater for the city’s immediate needs even as a Master Plan was formulated in 1961. That ad hoc approach to urban planning, coupled with the continued state determination to maintain New Delhi proper’s low density and elite bias, set the direction for Delhi’s future journey. Unfortunately, the second part of the book, is rather frustrating, since it provides only sketchy outlines of post-1947 Indian governmental policies and the stark gaps they created between ceremonial capital investment and wider civic sustainability, and gives little attention to wider context.

As an academic who teaches a course on Delhi in which it is often a challenge to introduce students to the considerable amount of scholarship by architects and planners on New Delhi, my first thought was that this work serves as a useful overview and introduction. However, in seeking to advance this work’s credentials to those of a full-fledged scholarly monograph on post-colonial urbanity, the author’s remit promises much that it does not deliver. The author would have been well advised to move beyond the limits of the New Delhi master-plan and policy shortcomings to some consideration of how key events displayed continuity with the imperial arrogance of Delhi’s masters. These events include the emergency ‘slum clearances’, ‘Sikh pogroms’ and subsequent ‘resettlement colony’ locations on the city margins, the Indian state’s urban reshaping for the Asian and Commonwealth Games, and the recent judiciary-led environmental campaigns to ‘clean’ the city. It would also have been valuable to have had discussion of the dubious impact of these measures upon the ‘true democracy’ that underlies future directions for urban research and planning that the author sets out. Thus, the book would be of more use to scholars and planners had Gupta accessed some of the cutting-edge scholarship on Delhi recently emanating out of scholar/activist organizations such as SARAI, and a wider selection of newer, politically engaged and astute works by social scientists and commentators such as Vijay Prashad, Emma Tarlo, Ranjana Sengupta, Ravi Sundaram, Deepu Sharan and Bharati Chaturvedi.

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Planning Asian cities: risks and resilience

Comprising twelve chapters by various authors on eleven major cities in Pacific Asia, this book adopts the theme ‘risks and resilience’ as a unifying rubric for the collective endeavour. Unfortunately, not all the authors heed the editors’ recommendation to make it a cohesive project. Planning Asian cities seems a too ambitious topic for a simple book, though additional sub-themes (the aspiration to become world cities and metropolitan governance) are identified in the introductory chapter. The challenge therefore is to make the eleven cities selected as case studies – places that are culturally, socially and economically diverse – bind together. However, I doubt whether the notion of Asian cities means anything that is academically useful. The more-focused conceptions of Japanese cities, Thai cities, or Vietnamese cities, for instance, are less ambiguous than the broad term ‘Asian cities’. Yet despite my own doubts about this term, I still consider this book a worthwhile contribution to the existing literature in English about cities in Asia. It is readable for those who are conversant with English and this matter should not be downplayed as language is a great barrier to people in Asia understanding one another. As Asia’s ‘business language’, English is a useful lingua franca for communication between people across Asia. Inevitably, however, meaningful and unique local messages could be lost during translation into English, and this may well be the case with some chapters in Planning Asian cities.

Most chapters are descriptive rather than analytical. Some are undoubtedly of scholarly value. As an example, the study of citizen-initiated machizukuri (community development) projects in Tokyo by André Sorensen touches upon matters of local autonomy and citizen participation. Whilst Japan is well known as a conformist and egalitarian society, machizukuri implies competition, and possibly confrontation between the local community and authorities at higher levels. Is conformist Japan a superficial perception by outsiders? Stereotypes prevail when there are deep cultural and linguistic gaps.

As the prime city in Taiwan, one of the four Asian tigers, Taipei has gone through tremendous political upheavals in its contemporary history. In 1895 it was ceded to Japan, and subsequently endured 50 years of colonization. Then in the late-1940s it was taken over by the Kuomintang who were defeated in mainland China and took refuge in Taiwan. The tension between benshengren (local residents whose ancestors migrated to Taiwan many generations ago) and waishengren (recent migrants who followed the Kuomintang to Taiwan) is an omnipresent issue in the management of Taiwan society. The authors of the chapter on Taipei (Liling Huang and Reginald Yin-Wang Kwok) rightly connect that city’s future development to its relationship with mainland China, globalization, and national identity. Critical issues are made clear, but solutions are not provided. The trajectory of Taipei thus remains uncertain.

Post-Batavia Jakarta as a historical city of South-East Asia has been shaped by those who ruled over it (Soekarno, Soeharto and Ali Sadikin, to cite three) rather than by rules (in the sense of urban planning) as the authors Wilmar Salim and Tommy Firman declare. However, its citizens should not be forgotten as a collective force on the shaping of the city, for they have spontaneously built large amounts of informal housing. Notably, it is clearly shown that Jakarta is facing grave problems of population pressure (caused by continuous immigration), choking traffic congestion (partly due to poor public transportation), and frequent flooding. These problems pose massive challenges.

Hong Kong has been undergoing major economic restructuring since the 1970s. This has accelerated since 1997 when the city ended its colonial relationship with Britain and became a Special Administrative Region of China. Manufacturing in recent decades in Hong Kong has been declining drastically – from 47 per cent of total employment in 1971 to a mere 4.7 per cent in 2008. Meanwhile the financial sector has been growing rapidly, comprising 18 per cent of total employment in 2008. The puzzle, however, shown in Planning Asian cities is that this supposedly favourable economic upgrading has caused much pain to Hong Kong people. Traditionally, Hong Kong and its hinterland of the Pearl River Delta (PRD) have a relationship categorized as ‘front shop, back factories’. Hong Kong is thus the ‘dragon head’ of South China specializing in services, whilst the PRD specializes in manufacturing. The author, Anthony Yeh, claims that Hong Kong’s restructuring pains are now being caused by the gradual detachment of the dragon head from its body. Accordingly, one might ask why the PRD does not use more of Hong Kong’s established services rather than developing its own. Why is it
Guangzhou, not Hong Kong, that really serves the PRD?

A number of chapters in this book, such as those touched on in this review, are valuable contributions. It is primarily as a collection of individual essays, rather than as a coherent volume, that Planning Asian cities is worth reading.

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This volume, produced by English Heritage as part of its series on informed conservation, provides a thorough guide to the origins of the Garden City movement and its evolution. Produced for a general rather than an academic audience, it breaks little new ground, but its high quality photographs and graphics, both contemporary and historical, illuminate the subject and underscore the importance of protecting from overdevelopment the surviving physical remnants of this landmark tradition.

The origins of the Garden City movement are well known, not the least through Mervyn Miller’s own extensive writing on the subject. Ebenezer Howard’s concept for melding innovative design with a utopian vision for alleviating urban poverty sparked a movement which resulted initially in three pioneer communities in England – Letchworth, Hampstead Garden Suburb, and Welwyn Garden City – as well as a few imitations in the United States. By limiting the size of each new community to no more than 30,000 people, and surrounding the built core with a green belt, Howard hoped to provide an alternative environment to urban slums by assuring healthy living and strong community ties at an affordable price. The marriage of the best of city and country living, he believed, would provide a radically different lifestyle from which would ‘spring a new hope, a new life, a new civilization’. Through working within a capitalist system, Howard expected that by limiting the return to investors, he could use excess profits both to finance community facilities and to keep rents low.

Howard’s vision was more fully realized in physical development than in social reform, and it is not surprising given the sponsorship of the book that Miller concentrates on the built environment. Much of the book traces the precedents for the Garden City in the Arts and Crafts movement, company town planning, and the development of the Garden City Association’s three completed towns. Each town is fully described and its origin illustrated, and there are separate chapters on homes and factory buildings. Here, readers literally see the primary work of the great architects involved in the effort, including most formidably Howard’s close associates Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin, as well as Lutyens and de Soissons, among others. The narrative sometimes declines into cataloguing buildings and associated sites, such as parks and gardens, but the illustrations, many of them of stunning beauty, bring home the quality of the workmanship. A final chapter on threats to this legacy gives the book a sense of immediacy not otherwise suggested by its coffee-table qualities. Miller describes a number of conservation tools currently employed, including designation as conservation areas and leasehold controls. Nevertheless, Miller reports that Garden Cities remain vulnerable to development, including inappropriate design for building additions as well as the introduction of incompatible new structures. Noting that the importance of Garden Cities lies in ‘the integrity of the whole designed landscape’, he believes that there ‘is a clear danger that they will lose the precious features which make them attractive places to live and work’ (p. 96).

As much as the original Garden City examples predominate, Miller’s book also provides a useful history of the movement’s evolution, including the incorporation of Howard’s ideas in English national planning policy. As a result, variations on Howard’s ideas appeared in full or in part in a number of forms throughout the twentieth century. A useful gazetteer at the end of the book lists the major Garden City sites by region. The results were mixed. Most intriguing is Wythenshawe. Produced in response to the 1919 housing act adopting Garden City standards for government-subsidized local authority housing, Wythenshawe incorporated Howard’s social ideal by attempting to provide an alternative living environment for Manchester’s inner city residents. Miller carefully details the ways the new community met or deviated from Barry Parker’s design, concluding that it represented only partial realization of Howard’s vision for a new civilization. Yet because he focuses on the physical environment at the expense of recounting social history, Miller in his Wythenshawe example, as well as elsewhere in
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the book, neglects to fully explore the heart of Howard’s intent: to make better citizens through the provision of an aesthetically pleasing and well planned environment. Because Garden City areas are well designed, they tend to rise in value, thereby excluding many of the less wealthy clients for which Howard intended them. In their success, perhaps, such areas have changed into closed communities without gates, thereby reducing their intended effect of alleviating urban poverty. If Miller is right in saying that affluence, in the form of buyers who want to remake their homes, is the biggest danger to the protection of these areas, what of the lost legacy that was intended to assure common benefits to residents of limited wealth?

In fairness, this was not the subject Miller was commissioned to address. In promoting the protection of a whole environment, however, one would hope that social as well as physical considerations would be valued. Howard would have expected no less.

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Spacematrix: space, density and urban form

Spacematrix explores the potential of urban density as a tool for urban planning and design. The authors’ fascination with density is not primarily normative, making no claim to know which density is best, but is driven by the desire to understand the relational logic between density, urban form and performance. This is a prerequisite for understanding and successfully predicting the effects of specific designs and planning proposals. The focus of attention is the relationship between types of urban environment and data such as amount, size, physical properties and economic values.

The text presents a clear investigation of the highly articulated and currently important issue of urban space, with a particular focus on relations and the possible declensions that can be developed between building/urban density and the urban form of the city as the spatial result of the act of design. The various chapters examine the concepts of density, urban development/land consumption, the concept of spacematrix as a multi-variable density, as well as the potential, quality, and performance of variable density, in the end exploring a number of design case studies as practical examples. It is worthwhile underlining how the cultural approach and the organization of the text continually highlight the dialectic relationship between the elements of which the city is composed. This ensures that there is no loss of the central objective of the study being conducted: in other words the investigation of the possible relation between density and urban morphology. It is almost as if the question underlying the text is precisely that of verifying/investigating the possibility of determining the form of the city, beginning with the very concept of density, its value, and the relations established between spatial values and density itself.

Spacematrix proposes an appropriate methodology that, by exploiting an objective tool of measurement, in this case density, can be applied both during the phase of analysis as well as at the moment of design. This twofold validity is derived from the fact that studying urban density means returning to dealing with space/dimensions; in other words the necessary and indispensable act prior to any action of design or planning. This treatise is supported and integrated by significant historical retrospectives and specific references to urban planning theories from the European and extra-European panorama, as revealed in the second chapter. The theme dealt with highlights the importance of the interrelation between the scales of design, focusing attention on the relationship between the building and urban design. In this manner the investigation explores the option of recovering the possibility/modality of realizing an integrated scenario of relations between the building, urban context/design and urban landscaping design precisely because the examination of density can be utilized in diverse contexts of territorial phenomena, thus allowing for its interdisciplinary use as a tool of dialogue.

Density becomes a variable to be utilized transversally, initially to understand and later to resolve the complexity of the problems of the contemporary city, in which diverse activities, necessities, and social classes coexist and share the same spaces: these thus become an important element in the construction of recognizable urban scenarios, as the expression of diffuse urban quality. Density is transformed, as a result, into an urban variable capable of defining the current form of the city, developing into a tool for reading, measuring and designing, as well as controlling in the case of urban sprawl. The study made by Berghauser Pont and Haupt is used to open up new
disciplinary horizons within the field of study of urban density and space syntax, in addition to new operative paths within the approach to designing the city: an approach that provides a tool of investigation and design that can be defined to match different urban situations. The investigation is clearly explained in the form of a chart of possible solutions to diverse scales of design, marking an opening towards new ways of investigating and designing the city. It almost resembles a return to a model-based approach, though with a greater freedom of action resulting precisely from the use of density as a parameter of calculation. This allows the prefiguration of the possible configurations of the city, beginning precisely with the context in which one operates – imagining quantitative as well as typological, morphological, and spatial aspects.  

Berghauser Pont and Haupt demystify the use of image-based references and concepts such as ‘urbanity’ by challenging the reliability of such concepts, and critically examining the possibility of redefining them through the concept of density. Equipped with a structural understanding of the nature of urban density, the skills needed by architects and planners in their daily trade-offs between quantitative requirements, physical constraints and qualitative preferences are then expanded upon. This should also empower such professionals in their collaboration and confrontation with economists, engineers and politicians. Spacematrix is of interest to architects as well as urban planners and designers, but is equally relevant to other professionals working in the field of urbanism, such as developers, economists, engineers, and policy makers.

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ISUF Task Force on Research and Practice

The President of ISUF has constituted a task force to report on how research and practice in urban morphology can be more effectively integrated. Although there are a number of references to practice in this journal it would be helpful to the members of the Task Force to know of other cases. These could include examples where aspects of an urban morphological approach in the widest sense have been integrated with other methods and could include inter alia conservation area studies, masterplans, local plans, detailed plans, design projects and implementations, urban design frameworks, codes and guides. The applications and terminology will of course vary according to the local context and legislation.

It would be particularly helpful to the Task Force to learn of cases where applications have been evaluated for their efficacy and of ISUF members’ experience of cases in which attempts to integrate research and practice have been unsuccessful and the reasons for failure.

Information should be sent to the Chair of the Task Force, Ivor Samuels, at ivor.samuels@googlemail.com

Teaching urban morphology: call for papers

ISUF has considered issues of how urban morphology is taught on several occasions, but the most recent was at its conference in Trani in 2003. At that time it was a concern that a survey showed that much of what was taught under this term focused on the Chicago School’s zone models and their derivatives. Since then, not only have ideas developed, but new resources, including high-quality digital mapping, and the technology to manipulate data have become much more readily available. Yet has there been any significant development in how morphology is taught, both in professional courses and more widely?

A theme session on ‘teaching urban morphology’ is planned for the ISUF conference in Delft, 17-20 October 2012. We urge readers to submit papers (see p. 26 of this issue), and to present their teaching resources. The session will be convened by Vítor Oliveira (E-mail: vitorm@fe.up.pt) and Peter J. Larkham (E-mail: peter.larkham@bcu.ac.uk).