
This conference was hosted by the newborn Nordic Network of Urban Morphology in collaboration with ISUF. It attracted about 100 participants from all over the world to exchange the latest advances in urban morphology. The centrepieces of the meeting, following the welcoming speeches of the organizers and the city planners from Stockholm on the first day, were two full days of presentations, comprising four keynote addresses and about 50 papers. Three parallel sessions were held in the wonderful library of the Royal Institute of Technology, situated in an inner fringe belt of the city. On the fourth day, some of the participants completed their stay under the Nordic light with field trips to the suburbs of Stockholm. To stimulate the discussions, there were also three other high spots: the introduction to the meeting and its ice-breaker cocktails in the lounge of the School of Architecture and two official dinners, the first organized by the Nordic Network and ISUF, and the second hosted by the City of Stockholm in the sumptuous City Hall (Figure 1).

The papers and associated discussions were in many ways characteristic of the richness and highly participatory atmosphere of the whole meeting. Despite there being simultaneous sessions it was possible to distil from the great range of papers, and by dissecting the presentations of the keynote speakers, a set of primary problems for future developments in urban morphology and some guidelines for surviving unharmed in a journey through the complexities of urban morphology as it matures as an interdisciplinary field. In fact I was reminded of the occasion, nearly 100 years earlier at the conference of the International Mathematical Society in 1900, when German mathematician David Hilbert presented a set of ‘23 problems’ which it might be argued decided the evolution of his discipline for the next century.

Three main topics were discussed in Stockholm that could well form a basis for future debates: practical use of urban morphological theories, regionalization of urban morphological research, and communication of urban morphological knowledge.

The practical use of theories seemed to worry many of the users of morphological results, perhaps even more than the producers of this precise knowledge. Here we are again, as in Robert Frost’s poem, in front of ‘the road not taken’, not knowing what to answer. Should urban morphology be led by the needs of urban policies and practitioners? Or should its research continue to be largely independent, following its own way? It seems pertinent to ask which is the road ‘less traveled’ and whether this road is a good one. If we take into account that most of the papers presented were case studies of singular places and times and some others were about theoretical issues (working on the principia or fundamental morphological concepts introduced by either M.R.G. Conzen or G. Caniggia), then it may be appropriate to subscribe to the thesis of a more ‘practical’ urban morphology, developing more normative studies and less positive ones. However, when looking at some present-day developments in the urban landscape, it is easy to see the gap between the increasing knowledge provided by historico-geographical studies and the heuristic and highly normative approaches of contemporary urban planners. In this case, looking at the historical depth of city form may seem like peering into ‘the undergrowth’. In any case, we shall not be able to answer the complex question as to whether it is more relevant to create a theory of past and present practices or to put present and past theories into ‘good practice’. Nevertheless, we should not forget that ramblers on the divergent roads may finally find a crossroads leading them to a unique or, at least, more integrated theory. Such is the interdisciplinary venture of future urban morphological studies.

With regard to the regionalization of urban morphological research there is a kind of political ambiguity within ISUF. We can salute the wonderful effort made by the Nordic researchers to create a regional network for discussing morphological issues but, at the same time, it is impossible not to regret being unable to consolidate the internationalism of the discipline inside ISUF. We shall soon have an Italian Network, and then certainly a réseau français, and eventually perhaps have so many small sub-networks as to practically recreate the original patchwork structure. Alternatively, from a more pessimistic point of view, the idea of an International Network may collapse and fundamental concepts will cease to be discussed in a worldwide forum that is the very essence of ISUF. The multi-linguistic problem certainly adds to the confusion, English having...
been the closest to a common denominator so far. The problems of introducing *nuances* into urban morphological concepts and giving greater importance to the regional schools of thought is still unresolved.

Finally, with regard to the communication of urban morphological knowledge, I should like to consider here a kind of synthesis of the two previous topics. In the lack of focus in transmitting our knowledge to a larger audience of know-how actors there is a certain fragility in our discipline. Hitherto, the main streams of communication of urban morphological knowledge have been excellent academic products: scientific papers (inside or outside the journal *Urban Morphology*), books and teaching. We now need to find another kind of language to provide for a wider public the means of understanding and using the richness of urban form. This requires other skills: it is to be hoped that through exploration of new multi-disciplinary combinations there will emerge a new kind of expertise.

Without attempting to provide a conclusive response to these open questions, this remarkable conference highlighted the eagerness to explore epistemological and practical issues in urban morphology. We look forward to continuing this memorable discussion under another magical light, in Brazil, at the next ISUF conference.

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**Visual planning and urbanism in the mid-twentieth century**

A conference on this theme will be held on 13-15 September 2007 at the University of Newcastle, UK. It will consider some of the key ideas of visual planning and approaches to urbanism of the period, with a particular focus on the contribution of visual and three-dimensional planning as a means of achieving a reformulation of urbanism. This forms part of an AHRC project focusing on the planner Thomas Sharp. The three main paper themes are ‘Visual planning and urbanism in the UK including the Townscape movement’, ‘Visual planning and urbanism: international perspectives’, and ‘The work and life of Thomas Sharp’.

Those interested in attending should contact Laura Fernandez (Laura.Fernandez@ncl.ac.uk). The registration cost is £50 (before 25 May; £75 thereafter) and University accommodation is available at £22 per night.