Fourteenth International Seminar on Urban Form, Ouro Preto, Brazil, 28-31 August 2007

This was the first ISUF conference to be held outside Europe and North America. It was also by far the largest ISUF conference to date. Out of 412 abstracts submitted by prospective speakers, 220 survived the vetting process and formed the basis for presentations at the conference. The number of participants, 310, was also a record, as was the number attending from countries as far away as China (14) and Russia (10). However, the Centro de Artes e Convenções da Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto and the local hotels were well able to cope with this influx of urban morphologists, provision for visitors in this rather remote town having been stimulated by its designation as a World Heritage Site in 1980. The Brazilian organizers of the conference, led by Staël de Alvarenga Pereira Costa (Universidade de Federal de Minas Gerais), are to be congratulated on their organization of this unexpectedly large and very productive event.

For those arriving in good time, a prelude to the conference was a walking tour of Ouro Preto led by June Komisar (Ryerson University) who has undertaken detailed research on the town over a number of years. Brought into existence by the discovery of gold at the end of the seventeenth century, the town now known as Ouro Preto developed as a series of hamlets located in relation to the veins of gold and connected by paths across the mountainous landscape. The gradual consolidation of these initial settlements, with their often prominent churches, and the planning in the early eighteenth century of a town centre (Figure 1) were among the themes developed during the tour.

After the official opening of the conference, the paper sessions began with a keynote address by Ivor Samuels (University of Birmingham and Oxford Brookes University) on typomorphology and urban design practice. It was exemplified largely by work done in England, but the wide relevance of his argument was manifest. At its core was the application of the explanatory powers of urban morphology in planning practice. He argued that this is not only a matter of managing conservation and change in historical urban landscapes, but also of using the lessons learned from past landscapes to create new ones. In particular he argued for the much greater emphasis on enduring structures, such as the pattern of streets and plots, as distinct from the relatively ephemeral architectural superstructure. Major parts of Samuels’ argument are developed elsewhere in this issue (pp. 58-62).

The ensuing proceedings that day and in the following two days covered a very wide range of topics, most of them dealt with in concurrent sessions of paper presentations. There were also five further plenary sessions and a New Researchers’ Forum. The plenary sessions covered five themes: non-Western cities; urban morphology and computers; urban form and density; architecture and urban design restoration; and open spaces, squares, forms and landscape. As always, a good deal of fruitful discussion took place during informal exchanges during coffee breaks (Figure 2).
Figure 1. Part of the main core area of Ouro Preto, with the eighteenth-century central plaza in the middle ground.

Figure 2. A gathering of participants during one of the coffee breaks.
and at meal times. All submitted papers were made available to participants on DVD.

Immediately following the conference, about 50 of the participants took part in a two-day workshop on the Brazilian, English and Italian ‘schools’ of urban morphology. In the case of each school there were presentations on basic tenets and methods, discussions of applications to the case of Ouro Preto, and demonstrations in the field (Figure 3).

Before returning to their respective countries in distant parts of the world, many participants took part in one of four excursions. These were in Belo Horizonte, Brasilia, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Providing a brief view of some of the landscapes of Brazil’s burgeoning cities, they were a fitting finale.

Before this conference, participation by Brazilians in the activities of ISUF had been limited to a dozen or so members. It has become evident during the past 18 months, in the course of preparing for the conference in Ouro Preto and at the conference itself, that the interest in urban morphology in Brazil is very substantial. Visits to ISUF’s website from Brazil are in frequency now third only to those from the United States and the United Kingdom. It is to be hoped that the momentum that has been created by the first ISUF conference in Brazil will be reflected in South American participation in forthcoming ISUF events in other parts of the world.

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ISUF business meetings, Ouro Preto, Brazil, August 2007

Meetings of the Council and Editorial Board of ISUF took place on Tuesday 28 August in Ouro Preto, immediately before the annual conference. A General Meeting of ISUF took place during the conference. This report covers all three meetings.

Secretary-General’s report

The decision to hold the conference in 2008 in Rabat, Morocco, was reviewed owing to organizational difficulties experienced by the local organizer. Abdellah Abarkan was seeking alternative venues. If the conference could not be relocated to another venue in Morocco, it would be held in Italy in association with the meeting of ISUF Italia.

The conference in 2009 would be held at South China University of Technology (SCUT),
Guangzhou, China from Friday 4 September to Monday 7 September 2009. The principal organizer would be Professor Yinsheng Tian of the Department of Architecture at SCUT. Dr Kai Gu of the University of Auckland would co-ordinate the conference on behalf of the Council of ISUF.

**Treasurer’s report**

Keith Lilley was unable to attend the meetings but submitted a report which indicated that ISUF’s finances were healthy. For the year 2006/7 payments exceeded receipts but money overdue from institutional subscriptions should offset the deficit. The Treasurer thanked Professor Abdellah Abarkan for the funds received from the Stockholm conference.

ISUF’s main expenditure continued to be the production of *Urban Morphology* and it was noted that there had been a small increase in costs this year.

The number of individual members continued to grow. Members who had joined in Ouro Preto would benefit from an extended membership period until 31 December 2008. This would include free copies of the journal. The Treasurer noted that an improved membership database for both individual and institutional members was needed. He recommended that consideration be given to the appointment of a Membership Secretary.

**Editor’s report**

Jeremy Whitehand reported that there had been some improvement in the quality of articles received but there was still a need to improve diversity. In particular more submissions would be welcome from outside Europe and North America. Regional reviews and thematic progress reviews were continuing. The flow of ‘viewpoints’ remained satisfactory, but it was hoped to enlarge the size of the book review section.

Access to the journal through the website is available for the early issues (up to and including 2001). Library subscribers have access to recent issues. It is hoped to provide free access as soon as possible to library subscribers for the whole run of issues.

The flow of manuscripts has been such that the number of pages in the journal has remained at the increased level of Volume 10. About one-third of the articles submitted were accepted for publication. During 2006/7 the average time lapse between receipt of revised version of an article and publication was approximately 6.5 months. This is the longest time lapse since the journal began, but is still substantially less than for most journals.

**New appointments**

To fill the vacancies created by the retirement of Sylvain Malfroy, Attilio Petruccioli and Jeremy Whitehand, and the appointment of Nicola Marzot as Secretary-General, the following people were elected to Council: Abdellah Abarkan, Jason Gilliland, Peter Larkham and Shigeru Satoh. Kai Gu was co-opted onto the Council. Emily Talen was appointed to the Editorial Board, following the retirement of Anne-Sophie Clémençon.

**Webmaster’s report**

Elwin Koster was unable to attend the meetings, but submitted a written report. The website continued to grow in 2006/7. A user database has been set up on which users can add and change their own data. It is hoped to expand the database so that it can be used for conference registration.

**Regional associations**

Giuseppe Strappa reported that ISUF Italia had had three meetings so far and these had been very successful. 42 individuals had joined the Group. Current members are all from an architectural background. It is hoped to attract others, such as Italian geographers, in order to maintain the interdisciplinary ethos of ISUF.

**New Researchers’ Forum**

It was agreed that there should be greater encouragement for younger members and that they should have a more substantial time allocation at conferences. Their participation in regional associations should be encouraged and their contributions to a Newsletter were welcomed.

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