ISUF 2011 was only the second ISUF conference to be held in North America. With the theme ‘Urban morphology and the post-carbon city’, it was held at Concordia University, on the Sir George Williams Campus, located in downtown Montréal in the vibrant Rue Sainte-Catherine. The Canadian organizers of the conference, led by Pierre Gauthier (Concordia University) and Jason Gilliland (University of Western Ontario), are to be congratulated on their organization of this remarkable and very productive event.

Like the last ISUF conference in North America (in Cincinnati in 2001), this one in Montréal was a huge success. There were 217 presentations and more than 250 participants. It is to be hoped that the strong Canadian participation in ISUF 2011 will be followed by increasing Canadian participation in ISUF more generally in the coming years, as occurred in the case of Brazilian participation after the Ouro Preto conference in 2007.

The truly international dimension of ISUF was once again evident, with participants coming from five continents. As expected the Americas (50 per cent) and Europe (28 per cent) were the most represented parts of the world. Unfortunately, African participation was small (2 per cent). Nevertheless, the participation of the Algerian delegation, ‘representing’ the African Continent, should be highlighted. Organizers of future conferences should clearly affirm the promotion of African participation as a key challenge. A closer look at the top ten countries by the origin of those presenting papers reveals that the three most represented countries were all in the Americas (Canada, Brazil and the United States) followed in descending order by the United Kingdom, France, China, Portugal, Japan, Australia, and Sweden.

Besides providing the stage for very productive urban morphological debate, this conference offered participants the opportunity – enhanced by the field trips on the second day – to discover a fascinating city. The history of Montréal started with a small mission colony of about 50 settlers in 1642, later becoming an active commercial centre, and then an important metropolis. Industrialization and the development of the service sector were crucial for that development process. The exceptional conditions of the site (particularly Mount Royal and its surrounding forests, the St. Lawrence River, and the Lachine rapids) were decisive in the establishment of the first settlements. Throughout the years these initial conditions were adapted and transformed to meet the needs of growing urban populations.
urban forms expanded in the form of a powerful urban grid, parallel to the river. More recently there were major changes in the city centre, including the construction of several skyscrapers.

After the official opening of the conference, the paper sessions began with a keynote address by Jeremy Whitehand (University of Birmingham). Drawing especially on articles and editorials that he had published in Urban Morphology over recent years, he gave us a remarkable paper, where the key issues of – and the challenges for – urban morphology, as a field of knowledge in the contemporary world, were identified and debated. These issues were: the multidisciplinarity of urban morphology; the problem of ‘anglophone squint’; Euro-American ‘myopia’; the tension between the ‘particular’ and the ‘general’; the need for comparative studies; the need for integrated approaches; the relationship between research and practice; urban morphological classics; and finally, cross-disciplinary relationships.

Over the 4 days of the conference eight broad ‘streams’ were pursued: (1) advances in theory and methods; (2) temporality (continuity and change); (3) new regional spatial dynamics; (4) form, society and technology; (5) heritage and form; (6) topical explorations; (7) form, sustainability and climatic change; and finally, (8) urban morphology, planning and urban design. Streams 7 and 8 contained the largest number of presentations. This seems to confirm that the relationships between urban morphology and both urban planning and other fields of knowledge concerning the city and the built environment are major issues under discussion by urban morphologists – see also Oliveira (2011). At the interface between urban morphology, sustainability and climatic-change studies, explored in Stream 7, it is important to highlight the work that is being developed in the National University of Singapore, Nanjing University, and the University of Western Ontario. However, Stream 3, which focused on new spatial dynamics at the regional scale (including issues such as the dispersed city and the fragmented city) attracted less than 10 papers – a reminder, perhaps, of the need for ISUF to address all the different scales in morphological theory, research and practice.

As always, rich morphological debates were not confined to the paper sessions. Many fruitful discussions took place during the social events of the conference: the coffee breaks and lunch breaks, the reception in the Canadian Centre for Architecture (Figure 1), and the gala dinner in the remarkable building of Marché Bonsecours (Figure 2).

The conference was concluded with a plenary presentation by Michael Conzen (University of Chicago) on the future of ISUF and, indeed, of urban morphology as a field of knowledge. Some of the themes that had been introduced by Jeremy Whitehand in the first day of the conference, and debated in different parallel sessions, were revisited. The different types of study of urban form and the need for comparative analysis, such as recently proposed by Karl Kropf (2009), were...
given particular attention. A wider framework of analysis, encompassing not only different approaches but also different disciplines, was proposed.

Before returning to their countries of origin some participants took part in one of two excursions. The first took participants to Quebec City (Figure 3), the capital of the province of Quebec, founded in the seventeenth century. The second excursion was to Toronto, founded in the late-eighteenth century, and now the largest city in Canada. The remaining participants departed with the satisfaction of being part of the large ISUF family and with renewed enthusiasm for another year of morphological research. After the attractive invitation of Nicola Marzot (Technische Universiteit Delft) at the end of the conference, a trip to Delft for ISUF 2012 should already be on the agenda of many participants.

References


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ISUF President’s Report

The growing size and diversity of the International Seminar on Urban Form challenges established habits and outlook. It has seemed important to me during the last year that ISUF should examine its role among the professional fields from which it draws support and embark on initiatives that will keep it useful in the future. Those goals suggested a two-stage approach: first, to reassess the internal functioning of the organization, and, secondly, to explore ways of increasing its relevance among fields to which it relates.

For all its growth, which stems in part from its...
interdisciplinary openness, ISUF is still a remarkably volunteer-driven group. This volunteerism keeps the financial costs of participation low: conference fees, given the size of the events, are still moderate; the cost of *Urban Morphology* is astonishingly low compared with that of other high-quality, refereed, scientific journals. The true costs of our operations are measured by the time and energy enthusiastically donated by enough of our members to keep these operations, and the website, going successfully. It is for this reason that I wish in this report to express on behalf of all members our sincere thanks for the ongoing contributions made by these volunteers, and especially those being made to the current phase of reappraisal within ISUF.

In line with our perceived ‘internal’ and ‘external’ needs, two short-term task forces worked hard during 2010-11 to streamline ISUF’s website and the procedures for organizing annual conferences. The Task Force to Reconstitute the Website worked to overhaul and rationalize the site’s fundamental structure, regain timeliness in managing library subscriptions to the journal’s online content, add cross-indexing features (prepared by Peter Larkham), and make provision for additional sections of planned content. Chaired by Jeremy Whitehand (UK), the group also included Kiril Stanilov (USA), Richard Whitehand (Sweden), and Susan Whitehand (UK). This allowed advanced expertise in website design and operation to be united with intimate knowledge of the membership/subscriber database kept by the Treasurer and the journal’s editorial team. The Task Force worked with skill and dispatch, and the stability and ease of use of our website following completion of its assignment are testimony to the success of the reorganization. ISUF members owe these colleagues very warm thanks for their hard work.

The other relatively urgent matter was to formulate simple but recognized procedures for proposing and then hosting the annual conferences. When meetings were small and confined to a convenient geographical orbit, arrangements could be left to the predilections of the local organizers, especially in the days of alternating large and small gatherings. But with the growing size of the conventions, and the desire within ISUF to broaden the intercontinental and cultural mix of meetings, some organizational aspects had to become more routine and predictable. Under the leadership of Kai Gu (New Zealand), our Secretary General, the Task Force to Revamp ISUF’s Conferences, on which Michael Barke (UK), Wendy McClure (USA), and Pierre Gauthier and Jason Gilliland (Canada) also served, drew up a set of planning guidelines that identified necessary factors and procedures to be incorporated into future meetings. Since the organizers of the 2011 Montréal meetings were members of the Task Force, it was possible not only to pave the way for future conference arrangements but to implement many of the ideas in time for that event. The planning framework included ideas for the incorporation of certain kinds of workshops, maximizing scholarly exchange through the careful composition of paper sessions, and further ideas for such things as funding opportunities, prizes and awards, and session monitors. For this team’s work, we in ISUF are very thankful indeed.

ISUF takes its scholarly journal very seriously, and its high professional standards and reputation for readability and diversity are now, after fifteen volumes, well established. Nevertheless, I felt it important that the journal not escape scrutiny. Therefore, the third team, the Task Force to Assess the Journal, chaired by Michaël Darin (France), with Giancarlo Cataldi (Italy), Howard Davis (USA), Teresa Marat-Mendes (Portugal) and Jeremy Whitehand (UK) as additional members, was asked to consider further ways in which the journal can extend its influence and better serve the interests of ISUF and its readers. These revolved around such ideas as regularizing the reporting of the activities of ISUF’s regional affiliates (largely country-based member groups such as those that have been established for the UK, Italy, the Nordic countries, and, most recently, Portugal). Also, there is potential to increase the range of books reviewed, perhaps organize theme issues, and generally extend the international scope of coverage of work being done in different world regions on urban morphology. Many of the ideas culled by the Task Force are desirable, but their implementation will depend on the willingness of ISUF members to increase their contributions in the form of writing and submissions to the Editor. Of equal significance is the present precarious balance between the ardent goal of inclusion and the painstaking editorial effort it takes to convert many submissions from around the world into seamless English, for those authors for whom this is not their natural language. For their nuanced and sensitive work in evaluating the challenges ahead for our valued journal, ISUF owes these task force members a big vote of thanks.

Now I turn to the two remaining – and currently running – task forces, charged with preparations for two initiatives requiring quite distinct creativity.
The first is the Task Force to Create an Expository Section on ISUF’s Website. The idea here is that many individuals among the various professions concerned with ‘urban form’, broadly conceived — not to mention the wider public — may not have an effective understanding of what ‘urban morphology’ as an intellectual field stands for and what it offers in the way of key concepts. It is, of course, these concepts and theories that make possible a coherent basis for analysis, both historical and prospective, so that persuasive policies for design and management can be advocated. Along with others who have shared this concern in preliminary discussions, I envisage a website section in the form of a mini ‘Urban Morphopedia’, whose abbreviated (and well-illustrated) encyclopedia-style entries will explain key concepts and theories used in urban morphological research. The short-term Task Force, under the chairmanship of Peter Larkham (UK), and consisting also of Marco Maretto (Italy), Fei Chen (UK), Remy Allain (France), Paul Hess (USA), and Jeremy Whitehand (UK), has been asked to consider how such an expository section should be organized, and to propose to ISUF Council an Editorial Board charged with developing this section over the next 2 or 3 years, during which time short essay entries would be commissioned, edited, and uploaded. It is hoped this task force will report its proposals to Council by September, 2012. I hereby encourage ISUF members and interested readers to contribute thoughts and ideas to this initiative over the next few months by contacting Peter Larkham (peter.larkham@bcu.ac.uk). The work of this Task Force is significant for improving scientific communication both between and beyond the ‘urban form’ professions, and is here acknowledged with appreciation.

Finally, the Task Force on Research and Practice has a charge that is perhaps the most nebulous but potentially the most far-reaching in a practical sense: to improve communications between the researchers who study urban form systematically and the practitioners (in both public and private sectors) who shape the design and management of urban form. The findings of the ‘researchers’ should be of more than theoretical interest to the ‘shapers’, and, conversely, the real-world experience of the latter should be equally valuable to the former. To what extent can ISUF play a role in seeking better communication? Chairing this group is Ivor Samuels (UK), assisted by Vítor Oliveira (Portugal), Art McCormack (Ireland), Sylvain Malfroy (Switzerland), Karl Kropf (UK), Giuseppe Strappa (Italy) and Amund Sinding-Larsen (Norway). Again, I encourage ISUF members and interested readers to contribute thoughts and ideas to this Task Force over the next few months by contacting Ivor Samuels (ivor.samuels@goolemail.com). Our prospective thanks go to this team also for taking on this challenging but promising line of inquiry.

The recommendations of the first three task forces have been received by Council. Some, considering their urgency, have been fully implemented, particularly with regard to the essential functionality of the website and the planning of future meetings. Various proposals for the journal are being weighed by the Editor. Recommendations from the two remaining task forces will be due no later than early September for Council consideration. I am hopeful that this extended round of refurbishment will position ISUF to be more visible among organizations that have something to say about the form of our cities. At the same time I hope this changing ISUF remains congenial to its long-time supporters, attracts and keeps new generations of enthusiastic members, and, above all, spurs many of them to become truly active in the shaping of ISUF itself.

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