
ISUF President's Report

As my term of office as President comes to an end, it is a great pleasure to write my final report. I wish to thank the many members of ISUF, especially the members of the Council and the Editorial Board, who have worked with me towards achieving the aims of ISUF and contributed to its activities over the past 4 years. Various objectives have been met and reflect a number of very successful collaborations.

The most important achievement has been the increasing awareness of the activities of ISUF outside Europe and America. The conferences in Brazil in 2007 and in China this year have been important stages in this development. The great success of the conference in Ouro Preto has been translated into increased membership of experts in the academic world of Latin America and has been the stimulus for new projects in that part of the world. The programme for the conference in Guangzhou suggests that this should also be a landmark event. This should be a stimulus to research into urban form in a major part of the world that has hitherto been under-represented in internationally-accessible publications in urban morphology.

I should like to take this opportunity to mention two smaller conferences, held in 2006 and in 2008, the first in Stockholm, Sweden and the second in Artimino, near Florence, Italy. The first was hosted by the Nordic Network of Urban Morphology and the second by CISPOT and ISUF Italia. In each case a strong international contribution was made to events organized by groups of experts belonging to a local network of ISUF. This accords with the Council's policy of developing its international contribution by strengthening national activities. This is an effective means of stimulating the

international comparison of research methods that in much of the twentieth century tended to be limited to their application to particular language areas. Also with the aim of improving methodological comparisons, it should soon be possible to publish the results of the planning workshop organized by ISUF Italia in the Spring of 2008 at Aramo, Pistoia, Italy. During one week, about 30 students and professors pursued a theme of architectonic planning for a new project in a historic area: they compared diverse approaches to methods derived from diverse schools of thought in architecture in Italy. The results, emanating from a variety of standpoints, produced an extremely interesting concluding synthesis.

Among the objectives achieved in the past 4 years, I wish to remind you of the importance taken on by our journal, *Urban Morphology*. This has achieved scientific excellence in our field and is stimulating very interesting debates and comparisons, especially with respect to methodology.

ISUF is undergoing important changes in the members who are principally responsible for running its affairs. By the time that this report is published a new President will have taken office, a new Secretary-General will be elected in the coming year, and we already have a new Treasurer. I hope these new Officers will oversee a further enhancement of ISUF's activities. I wish all members every success in the next phase of our organization's development.

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Seventh International Space Syntax Symposium, Stockholm, Sweden, 9-11 June 2009

Space syntax symposia have established a reputation in international architectural research for combining scientific rigour with relevance for architectural practice. The seventh in the series, hosted by the School of Architecture and the Built Environment at the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) in Stockholm, turned out to be no exception. The event attracted 198 delegates from 36 countries and 62 universities, who enjoyed 130 scientific papers as well as a feast of keynote addresses, themed debates and public and social events.

The scientific conference proper was preceded by a sell-out public event on 8 June. The venue for this, the iconic Modernist Kulturhuset on Sergels Torg, Stockholm's much-debated central public square, provided an apt reminder of just how controversial the built environment can be. Provocatively entitled 'The competitive edge in architecture', this seminar addressed the challenges that architects face in today's complex and

competitive world by inviting a series of prominent practitioners to consider the knowledge and skills required to build and manage large architectural and planning projects, and the role that research might play in leading to a more sustainable urban environment.

Bill Hillier (University College London) and Bjark Ingels, founder of the radical Copenhagen-based architectural practice BIG, discussed the importance of architectural knowledge and found a surprising meeting of minds over the proposition that architectural design is hypothetico-deductive. Spencer de Grey from the leading UK firm of Foster and Partners, and Ellen Hellsten, a partner in the small Norwegian architectural practice Ghilardi and Hellsten, spoke about the challenges large and small practices face in managing complex urban and building projects, and Tim Stonor (Space Syntax Limited) and Alexander Ståhle, a landscape architect from the Swedish practice Spacescape,

explored the relevance of space syntax for architectural practice. The event, which attracted about 500 conference delegates and built environment practitioners drawn from throughout the Nordic countries, engendered much lively debate.

Within the symposium proper, spatial accessibility emerged as a central organizing theme for several of the plenary sessions. All three keynote speeches touched in one way or another on different approaches to accessibility. Bill Hillier gave a thought-provoking account of spatial sustainability in cities; Chris Webster (Cardiff University) identified accessibility as a 'missing market' and set out a series of proposals about how to put a price on it; and Apostolos Georgopoulos (University of Minnesota) explored the interface between the spatial and cognitive processes involved in mentally navigating mazes.

Several of the thematic sessions, spearheaded by invited papers and supported by discussants who teased out the main issues and led the debate that followed, also dealt with accessibility in its various guises. The most explicit of these was the thematic seminar on measures of accessibility, at which L. G. Mattsson (Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm) talked about place, space syntax and attraction-accessibility, whilst Mike Batty (University College London) searched for a unified theory of accessibility. At the opposite end of the accessibility spectrum, another themed session led by Martina Löw (Technische Universität, Darmstadt) and Mats Franzén (University of Uppsala) tackled definitions of the spatial component of social segregation.

Much of the substantive work of the symposium took place in parallel, thematic sessions, which regrettably meant that delegates could only hear a small proportion of the papers that were presented in what turned out to be a very packed schedule. The symposium's themes included old favourites, such as urban territoriality, spatial morphology and urban growth, and the analysis of urban space in relation to social, economic and environmental sustainability, and also new ones, like building morphology and 'emergent performativity', which turned out to refer to the way in which buildings are inhabited by users, support different kinds of uses and express concepts and architectural intentions. Other thematic sessions dealt with spatial analysis and architectural theory, new methods of modelling

and methodological development, spatial configuration and social structure and also, echoing the theme of Monday's public event, the relationship between architectural research and architectural design.

Stockholm proved a wonderful venue for urban morphologists, and not just because of the charming thirteenth-century old town of Gamla Stan with its cobbled streets and historical buildings, but more importantly because of its urbane and civilized late-nineteenth-century neo-classical city plan, which permits today's pedestrians to experience at a leisurely pace the pleasures of light, fresh air, access to green spaces and a wealth of eye-catching architectural detail.

Social events included city walks led by enthusiastic and knowledgeable guides to various venues including Tensta, Sweden's largest Modernist housing suburb; Hammarby Sjöstad, a brand-new city district to the south of Stockholm; the UNESCO World Heritage site of Skogskyrkogården, the Woodland Cemetery designed by architects Sigurd Lewerentz and Gunnar Asplund between the 1920s and the 1940s; a tour of prize-winning buildings resulting from Stockholm's recent architectural competitions; the allotment gardens on the island of Södermalm; and the Årsta Community Centre designed and built between 1947 and 1953 to the south of central Stockholm by the architects and brothers Erik and Tore Ahlsén. Delegates were also treated to a reception and tour of Stockholm's beautiful City Hall, designed by architect Ragnar Östberg and inaugurated in 1923 as an exemplar of Sweden's National Romantic style, and a conference dinner at the Kulturhuset.

Preparations are already under way for the Eighth International Space Syntax Symposium, which will take place in 2011 and will be hosted by the Faculty of Architecture, Design, and Urban Studies at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, in Santiago de Chile. Papers from the Stockholm Symposium can be downloaded from the official website, www.sss7.org.

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