

Ninth International Space Syntax Symposium, Seoul, South Korea, 31 October - 3 November 2013

This report focuses on four keynote presentations that were highlights of the Symposium. The first by Bill Hillier was on the origins, current state and future of space syntax. In it a number of themes were explored, starting with the theory that settlements are designed partially by human intent but equally through laws of emergence, and that 'whenever we place an object in space it changes the ambient structure [of space]'. Hillier then put forward the concept of 'pervasive centrality' in urban morphology, namely that every location is close to a small centre and not far from a large one. In terms of the current state of space syntax he suggested that there are still unresolved questions about road-segments versus axial maps and the axial map may still be the more fundamental means of representing urban space. He concluded his talk with the question 'are there optimal ways in which we can organize a large city spatially?'

Alan Penn's presentation was on how science and culture unite (or do not) in the fields of architecture, urbanism and planning. He suggested that every design for a building or urban development is a hypothesis to be tested when it is built and this kind of theory is particularly concerned with 'social know-how' acquired through training. In architectural debate concepts are so ill-defined in language that the only way to falsify a theory is to build it and see how it works in the real world, and one test is whether it is saleable. He went on to discuss the creation of value in architecture and urban design and asked 'how do we consider value?' He suggested that in architecture and urban design we should be aiming to build spaces that have future 'existence value' (the intrinsic value of a cultural asset). His final argument was that existence value can only be achieved when a number of things come together synergistically, not only in science and art but also with respect to the socio-cultural aspects of a scheme/development.

Young Kim provided a topical discussion of the new urbanism of Seoul. He described how Confucian planning principles influenced the origins of Seoul's spatial structure. Key buildings were located on two axes: altars and ancestral shrines on the horizontal axis and politics and commerce on the vertical axis. Seoul lies in a basin surrounded by four mountains, and rainwater runs into the centre of the city: historically these waterways have dictated the road layout. Therefore, it was a city built in accord with nature,

being related to mountains and streams: geometry was not a major factor. However, after periods of rapid growth following the Korean War, strict geometry was superimposed on the city. Kim gave two examples of recent urban schemes: first, the Cheonggyecheon waterway, a stream in central Seoul, originally covered over as a road, then developed into an elevated highway. In 2005 the elevated highway was removed and the Cheonggyecheon restored. People have flocked to use it, the socio-economic value has increased and it has acted as a catalyst of revitalization in downtown Seoul. The second case study was the Jangsa-dong district, an area of small-scale, industrial workers in the middle of the city. An attempt made by planners to relocate the workers to a new district failed, and many companies went bankrupt or returned to the original area. Kim's summary is that Seoul is like an amorphous field where various actors and actants interact under the influence of unidirectional forces.

Finally, Renée Chow drew on her experience of urban design in China. She has grappled with many questions: for example, 'how do we understand urbanism?' and 'what is the role of design in supporting urbanism?' She explained that over the last 30 years China has undergone an unprecedented rapid urbanism, and she has been dismayed at the eradication of traditional neighbourhoods. This has resulted in a loss of legibility and an increase in homogeneity and uniformity. She suggested that the rapid change in Chinese cities sheds light on failures of urban design. Lessons could be learnt from China: designers need to be able to read locale, observations need to be generative, reading of a place should inform practice, and in good cities you should always feel as though you are 'inside' some larger construct – namely the concept of 'nested interiority'. She exemplified these principles by considering her recent competition design to expand a canal village outside Shanghai. Diagrams were presented to explain the morphology of water / walls / access / sun and how these traditional principles became the generators for the competition design.

Ruth Dalton, Room D121, Ellison Building, Faculty of Environment and Engineering, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 8ST, UK. E-mail: ruth.dalton@northumbria.ac.uk

Planning processes for sustainable urban form, Karlskrona, Sweden, 7-8 November 2013

A small but international and interdisciplinary meeting was organized in November at the Swedish School of Planning at the Blekinge Tekniska Högskola, Karlskrona, Sweden. Sustainable urban form is, of course, a contemporary professional and political ideal: but what is it and how do we achieve it, especially in existing settlements? This interesting and innovative event was primarily aimed at PhD students and new researchers, but drew together a range of eminent keynote speakers, and the School's Advisory Board. It responded to the School's research focus in planning for sustainable urban development. The event was linked to the Nordic Network of Urban Morphology, which has not been very active for the past few years; but it is hoped that this event will revitalize it.

The first keynote paper was from Simin Davoudi (Newcastle, UK). She emphasized that without sustainable cities there would be no sustainable works; but that cities are a plural, varied phenomenon. Factors related, albeit indirectly, to urban form, such as levels of transport-related emissions and building energy efficiency, are significant and merit greater attention. So how do

we change users' behaviour; indeed what constitutes 'behaviour'? A US model of 'sprawl' is still being widely followed, especially in Asia. In China, for example, urban development equal to the extent of Rome is being built every two weeks. A key problem is that we need to better understand how decisions are actually made with respect to urban form and use. The rational economic model hardly matches the messy and irrational decision-making of real life. So, for more sustainable cities, technical and structural change is important but insufficient. Behaviour change, perhaps radical, is also needed, at the level of individuals and institutions.

Karine Dupre (Griffith University, Australia) provided an interesting international comparative study of Australia (Brisbane) and Finland (Tampere, 'a very conservative city'), on planning processes and participants and, in particular, looking at provision (and even identification) of quality urban form and development (Figure 1). Perhaps the most interesting case was that of the Finnish annual Housing Fairs, month-long events where the public visit new urban quarters where all



Figure 1. The presentation by Karine Dupre (photograph by Beatrice Hedquist).

buildings are open for inspection; these events have been run by a non-profit organization for the past 40 years. It is interesting that, over time, the density of these flagship demonstration projects has decreased, seemingly in response to Finnish urban (and wider) culture which has a focus on proximity to nature. But many of these projects are rather disconnected from the city, poorly connected by public transport and, when occupied, have high car use rates.

Other keynotes were given by Akkelies van Nes (Bergen, Norway) on the intrinsic properties of urban form, discussing the complementarity of various approaches, including morphology, space syntax and phenomenology, and Ali Madanipour (Newcastle, UK) on the role of public space in sustainable development.

Finally, Anne Vernez Moudon (Washington, Seattle, USA) discussed approaches to structuring graduate programmes in urban morphology. She reviewed teaching, theoretical frameworks and pedagogical models in urban morphology, revisiting her 'catholic approach' paper (Moudon, 1992), and giving numerous examples drawn from the diverse work of her Urban Form Lab (<http://depts.washington.edu/ufl/>).

Presentations from graduate students generally took place in parallel sessions, and included papers from Karin Grundstrom on transforming the two distinct parts of Malmö through *stråk*, a difficult-to-translate word meaning, approximately, 'pathway', and implying both form and movement. Mixing and variation are seen as good qualities, but fragment-

ation is bad: where are the boundaries? This paper moved the conference theme of sustainable urban form and design from buildings to connections.

There was also a group of papers on conservation and design from Tony Svensson, Olof Woltil and Mahdi Yaghoubian, demonstrating not only some interesting theoretical and practical work, but that the event was drawing participants from outside Karlskrona.

Overall this conference was a thought-provoking and welcome initiative. It was well organized, and the campus provided an excellent venue even in November. Furthermore, and this is a crucial point in the management of events such as this, the schedule was carefully planned, with plenty of time for discussion. Although perhaps testing for the speakers, this did generate some very useful debate. Graduate students and new researchers had good access to subject experts. A second such event is now being planned for late 2014.

Reference

- Moudon, A.V. (1992) 'A catholic approach to organizing what urban designers should know', *Journal of Planning Literature* 6, 331-49.

Peter J. Larkham, Birmingham School of the Built Environment, Birmingham City University, Millennium Point, Curzon Street, Birmingham, B4 7XG, UK. E-mail: peter.larkham@bcu.ac.uk

Inaugural Seminar of the Chinese Network of Urban Morphology, Nanjing, China, 31 October 2013

A group of scholars conferred at the School of Architecture and Urban Planning, Nanjing University, on 31 October 2013 to inaugurate the Chinese Network of Urban Morphology. This report summarizes the principal matters considered at this seminar.

During China's unprecedented urbanization since the 1990s, new practical and theoretical questions have been raised. Urban morphology as the science of urban form provides a much needed theory and set of tools for addressing these questions. Urban morphological studies have undergone a marked growth in China, especially since the beginning of the twenty-first century (Figure 1). In 2009, the

Sixteenth International Seminar on Urban Form on the theme of Urban Morphology and Urban Transformation took place in Guangzhou, China. This further boosted interest in urban morphology and recognition of its relevance to Chinese urban development. In the last few years strong research groups working on urban form have been established at leading universities, and a number of English and French publications in the field have been translated. A Chinese Network of Urban Morphology has now been established to provide a platform to encourage and crystallize research interests and communications.

The inaugural seminar was attended by scholars

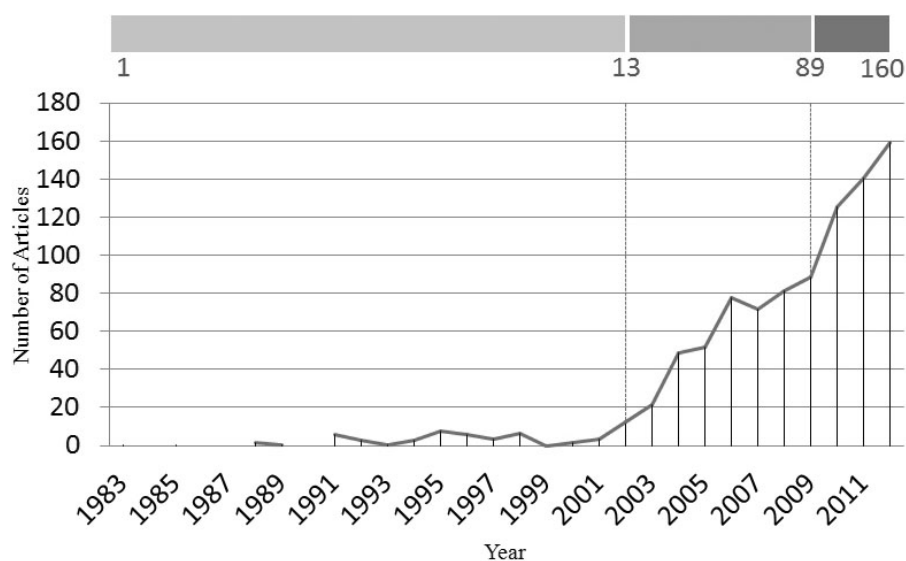


Figure 1. The number of academic journal articles using the term ‘urban morphology’. Source: China National Knowledge Infrastructure, accessed 5 January 2014.

from six Chinese universities as well as Jeremy Whitehand and Susan Whitehand from the University of Birmingham, UK and Kai Gu from the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Contributions were made by Wowo Ding, Andong Lu and Hongyan Xiao (Nanjing University), Yinsheng Tian (South China University of Technology), Dongqing Han (Southeast University), Feng Song (Peking University), Yong Chen (Tongji University) and Yuning Ren (Xi’an University of Architecture and Technology). Following these individual contributions three requirements underpinning the way forward were agreed:

- There is a crucial need for establishing urban morphology as a core theory for urban design.
- The findings of urban morphological research need to be utilized much more efficiently in practice.
- To lay a solid foundation, it is essential to build up an integrative terminology and methodology of urban morphology, taking into account the multilingual international forum within which urban morphological research and practice now functions.

Three primary objectives were outlined for the Chinese Network of Urban Morphology:

- The promotion of the study of urban form in China.
- The development of a research network in and beyond China on Chinese urban morphology, through the organization of seminars and the publication of a newsletter.
- The strengthening of relationships with ISUF and its other regional networks through collaboration on ISUF initiatives.

A steering committee of the Chinese Network of Urban Morphology will oversee the following activities:

- An annual research conference or seminar.
- The development of a website (www.urbanform.cn), including a regular online newsletter containing reports and working papers.
- Preparation for the Twenty-Third International Seminar on Urban Form (ISUF 2016) to be held at Nanjing University, China from 31 August to 3 September 2016. The theme of the conference will be ‘Urban morphology and the resilient city’.

Andong Lu, School of Architecture and Urban Planning, Nanjing University, 22 Hankou Road, Nanjing 210093, China. E-mail: alu@nju.edu.cn