
Visual planning and urbanism in the mid-twentieth century: conference at Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, 11-13 September 2007

Planning attitudes with a particular focus on visual and three-dimensional planning have been insufficiently studied in histories of modernism. This conference, sponsored by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council, focused on 'a strand of more practical urbanism, modernist in flavour but historically informed [which sought] to recover positive conceptions of the city and town after the perceived deprivations of the nineteenth century'. Dealing with a timespan similar to that of narratives of modernist planning which targeted a radical reformation of the city – from the CIAM doctrine codified by the Athens Charter to the de-urbanist proposals of Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City – most of the attitudes discussed in the conference papers remained critical of such radical restructuring. Facing demand for speedy transformation and the post-war need for reconstruction and conservation, they were formulated in order to cope with pressures exerted by twentieth-century modernization. Having been developed in the UK and having acquired international following, the concept of 'townscape' is well known, although its history has only recently been researched. However, the conference revealed that this was one among many visual planning concepts developed in countries such as Italy, Spain, Germany, Greece, France, Japan and India.

The conference was planned as part of the research and archival project 'Town and townscape: the work and life of Thomas Sharp'. A significant voice within the post-1930s debates on the development of and the threats to town and countryside, Thomas Sharp had a lasting influence in the UK and beyond. Produced just before the rebuilding that occurred after the Second World War, his plans for historic cities such as Oxford, Exeter and Durham (most published by the Architectural Press in book form) were formative in the development and dissemination of townscape as urban design and town planning pedagogy, and in setting precedents for the planning profession. Accompanied by an exhibition of Sharp's personal papers, drawings, and books catalogued and conserved in the collection by the project, the conference also presented an opportunity to introduce scholars to this unique collection (see www.ncl.ac.uk/library/sharp/index.php for more information).

The conference opened with an introduction by John Pendlebury (Newcastle University, and leader of the 'Town and townscape' project). There

followed a keynote paper by Heleni Porfyriou of Centro di Conservazione delle Opere d'Arte, Rome. Providing a historical introduction to visual planning, Porfyriou's paper on 'The legacy of Camillo Sitte from civic art to visual planning' recontextualized Sitte's oeuvre with reference to the nineteenth-century scientific foundations of his analysis of cities. Porfyriou noted that epistemological discoveries of subjective vision had a fundamental influence on Sitte's formulation of an art of urban space. Addressing the uninformed criticism that dismissed the work of Sitte as being a result of aesthetic preference based on scenographic arrangement, Porfyriou stated that Sitte was interested in 'the act of seeing', that is 'the physiological mechanism that gives rise to the perception of space on which all architectural effects are based' in order to explore the ramifications of scientific discovery in urban design.

Porfyriou's paper was followed by a historical re-evaluation of a tradition of pictorial composition in British architectural practice. Studying 'sketchbooks of collages of details and scenes' as inspirational precedents for future work, Michael Hebbert and Andrew Crompton (University of Manchester) argued that such practices, and knowledge acquired via such practices, are as valuable for the design of urban spaces as are theoretical explorations in architectural education. Jos Bosman (Eindhoven University of Technology) evaluated the 'German *stadtbild* discussion applied to English pastoral imagery' in the post-war reconstruction work of Werner Hasper in Kassel and Rudolph Schwarz in Cologne. Nicholas Bullock (Cambridge University) further demonstrated the tension between visual planning attitudes and the standpoints of CIAM in his examination of the work of Gaston Bardet and his supporters in France. Bardet was in vigorous and successful antagonism to Le Corbusier's urbanism in demanding a reconciliation of modernism with older French traditions and conservation of heritage. Bullock argued that by presenting an alternative approach in journals such as *Architecture Française* and *Urbanisme*, Bardet's approach was most influential in French post-war reconstruction.

Francesca Bonfante and Christina Pallini (Politecnico di Milano) pointed to the wealth of theoretical work after the Second World War in response to the urgency of maintaining the

historical dimension and geographical context of cities. The growing awareness among Italian architects of a unified approach to architecture and town planning that was structurally, functionally and morphologically flexible and adequate for city reconstruction was further clarified by Filippo de Pieri (Politecnico di Torino). He focused on the increased use of visual media in promoting urban conservation and redefining national identity. Eamon Caniffe (Manchester Metropolitan University) concluded the session on Italian reconstruction by pointing to the division between those who saw the potential of the Italian urban environment for tourism and those, such as the adherents of Team X, who claimed to see beyond that to an underlying structure.

The two sessions dedicated to work on Thomas Sharp opened with the personal reflections of Kathy Stansfield (now editor of *The Structural Engineer*), author of an MA thesis on the life and work of Thomas Sharp, a version of which was published in 1981 as a chapter in Gordon Cherry's *Pioneers in British planning*. In his keynote paper, Stephen Ward (Oxford Brookes University) presented an elaborate reassessment of Sharp's planning and writing career. He drew attention to the need to reposition Sharp more centrally in the history of the planning discipline and profession, especially of the 1930s and 1940s. According to Ward, British planning history, traditionally told largely in terms of the garden city and modernism, does not do justice to Sharp, although his impact on both camps is evident. John Pendlebury (Newcastle University) added that although visual planning was central to Sharp's approach, he was antagonistic to the garden city and suburb as well as social segregation and functional zoning. Sharp gave priority to pedestrians, mixed use and the street as the urban building block – views that seemed anachronistic at the time but which have now become commonplace. His emphasis on the conservation of urban character came into conflict with local and national priorities at the time of his plan for Chichester, according to the detailed and lively account by Peter Larkham (Birmingham City University). Erdem Erten (Izmir Institute of Technology) presented the results of his research on the Sharp collection which focused on Sharp's close collaboration with the *Architectural Review* in the development and dissemination of 'townscape', especially during the publication of his plans for Durham, Exeter, Oxford and Salisbury by the Architectural Press, the company that also produced the magazine edited and half-owned by H. de C. Hastings.

Nadia Fava (University of Girona) introduced her research on Leon Jaussely's Romulus plan of 1905 for Barcelona. Providing a foretaste of Sitte's principles put into practice, Jaussely accompanied his plans with 21 perspectives depicting the quality of urban space. Andrea Yuri Urushima (Kyoto University) and Keiichi Kobayashi (Tohoku University) presented their research on the echoes of 'townscape' in Japanese urbanism. Urushima focused on Uzo Nishiyama's role in opposing mainstream planning currents and his distrust of grandiose modernist planning schemes while looking for alternative approaches to city form.

Gordon Cullen's work on Calcutta (now Kolkata) in the 1960s was presented by Monica K. Bhargava (Centre of Built Environment, Calcutta). Bhargava, a collaborator of Santosh Gosh who had worked with Cullen, showed some of Cullen's unpublished sketches to illustrate his 'townscape' proposals for the city. Barnabas Calder (British Architectural Library, London) described the conflict between Denys Lasdun and Thomas Sharp stemming from Lasdun's proposals for tower blocks in Cambridge. Calder argued that the opposition between advocates of New Brutalism and those of 'townscape' was not as radically apparent in the New Brutalists' design principles: the New Brutalists owed debts to Sharp and his contemporaries.

Alluding to Robert Venturi's remarks on America's Main Street, the paper by Eleanor Smith Morris (Commonwealth Human Ecology Council) on 'Is New Urbanism almost all right?' established affinities between Thomas Sharp's approach and New Urbanism, sparking discussion on whether Sharp would have approved of New Urbanism. Aidan While and Malcolm Tait (University of Sheffield) reflected on Sharp's response to Princesshay in his plan for Exeter with reference to the dynamics of contemporary conservation practice, and how Sharp reconciled the demands of reconstruction and pedestrian experience with the memory of the blitzed city. Adding the final touch of theory, Andrew Law (Newcastle University) argued that the language of 'townscape', including the writings of Thomas Sharp, share an 'Anglo-American romantic language of organicism and landscape that has its roots in a philosophical and ideographic movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century'. Law warned that Sharp's language sometimes borders on an 'urban organic essentialism', connected to a 'twentieth-century imaginary of the urban as a living organism that could be growing in both 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' ways'.

On the final day, participants chose one of two field trips based on Sharp's planning career. While one party visited Durham, the spectacular cathedral city for which Sharp's plan was published in 1945, a second party visited a number of villages in northern England that Sharp analysed in his classic *The anatomy of the village*. Places visited included Kielder, built and only partially realized according to Sharp's designs for the Forestry Commission, and Stonehaugh and Byness, villages inspired by Sharp's studies for his book.

It is hoped that this conference will be one contribution among many to investigations into the history of strategies and pedagogical positions developed in response to emergent planning problems which aimed to mediate the pressures of a modern, technology-driven society and the need

for conservation in reconstruction. Although most historical work still concentrates on ideas on improving the 'functional performance' of the city or the post-war 'neo-avant-garde', these histories can only be made more meaningful when complemented by recent research on alternative positions. The most significant outcome of this conference was that the papers pointed to the possibility for alternative historical narratives. It is hoped that the results will soon be disseminated to a wider audience in various publications.

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ISUF 2009: Urban morphology and urban transformation

The Sixteenth International Seminar on Urban Form (ISUF 2009), co-hosted by South China University of Technology and Guangzhou Urban Planning Bureau, will take place in Guangzhou, China from Friday 4 September to Monday 7 September 2009. The theme of the conference is *Urban morphology and urban transformation*. The organizers and the Council of ISUF invite participation in the Conference by interested academics and professionals. Topics on which proposals are particularly welcome include:

- Urban morphological theory
- Urban morphology, planning and design
- Urban morphology and architectural design
- New developments in research on building typology
- Typological research, planning and design
- Cities in transition
- Cities in a global era
- Urban form in Asia
- Traditional urban form
- Urban heritage and change
- Geospatial technology in urban morphology

Proposals for papers should take the form of abstracts of papers, in either English or Chinese. They should be prepared in the following format: title of paper, author(s) name, affiliation, address, e-mail address, telephone number, key words and 250-word abstract. They should be addressed to

Professor Yinsheng Tian, Department of Architecture, College of Architecture and Civil Engineering, South China University of Technology, Guangzhou 510640, P. R. China (e-mail: ISUF2009@scut.edu.cn). Abstracts of papers must be received on or before 31 December 2008. Notification of whether abstracts have been accepted will be provided by 1 March 2009. Those whose abstracts have been accepted will be required to pay a registration fee by 15 June 2009 to have their papers included in the conference programme. The registration fee includes membership of ISUF, and conference lunches and dinners.

Following acceptance of abstracts, submission of papers (not exceeding 4000 words) is optional. If submitted, they should be received by Professor Tian by 15 July 2009. Authors should consult the notes for the guidance of contributors to *Urban Morphology*, available on the ISUF website (www.urbanform.org) or in recent copies of the journal, before preparing their papers. Selected papers may be published after the conference.

The official conference languages are English and Chinese. There will be a New Researchers' Forum, in which researchers new to the field are invited to take part. New researchers should indicate when they submit their abstracts whether they would like to be included in the New Researchers' Forum.

The city of Guangzhou, with over 2000 years of
