The present volume contains the abstracts presented at the 21st International Seminar on Urban Form, held in Porto, from 3 to 6 July, 2014. Authors alone are responsible for opinions expressed in the book.

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Preface

This year the International Seminar on Urban Form (ISUF) celebrates its twentieth birthday. Over the last two decades, the ISUF annual conferences and the journal Urban Morphology have steadily established as the main references of morphological debate worldwide.

The development of ISUF included the formation of affiliated networks. The Portuguese Network of Urban Morphology (PNUM) was established in 2010 at the Hamburg conference. In June 2011 the PNUM launched its annual conference and in December 2013 it published the first issue of the Revista de Morfologia Urbana. Against this dynamic background, and for the first time in two decades of history, the ISUF annual conference takes place in Portugal.

‘Our common future in urban morphology’ has a record number of presentations. Almost 400 presentations are included in the conference programme comprising four plenary sessions and 80 parallel sessions. This book, composed of two volumes, follows the structure of the conference. Volume 1 gathers the abstracts of all communications included in the conference programme. Volume 2 includes the full papers submitted to the conference.

The plenary sessions of ISUF2014 include an overview of the urban form and structure of Porto; a debate on different approaches in the study of urban form (the German morphogenetic approach, the Conzenian school, the Muratorian school and space syntax); the description of a repository of urban tissue; and, finally, the presentation of recent work developed by the ‘ISUF Task Force on Research and Practice in Urban Morphology’, particularly of four case studies of application of morphological concepts and methods in professional practice and of the ‘Porto Charter’ including ISUF’s fundamental principles.

The 80 parallel sessions are structured around ten fundamental themes (including also five special sessions): urban morphological theory; urban morphological methods and techniques; the evolution of urban form, agents of change; revisiting urban morphological classics; teaching urban form; comparative studies of urban form; multidisciplinarity in urban morphology; integrated approaches; and, finally, the relations between research and practice. The debate of these themes should help us to understand what should be our main contribution as urban morphologists, how it could be part of wider integrated research on cities, and how this could be applied into day-to-day practice.

Vítor Oliveira
Paulo Pinho
New perspectives on the meaning of urban form

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The recent proposal to include ‘meaning’ in the ISUF definition of urban morphology (Conzen, 2013) was followed by some discussion (Kropf and Malfroy, 2013). Since the structuralist approach to architecture (Eco, 1967) and to urban studies (Barthes, 1967) urban semiotics has developed into an almost autonomous discipline: in the presence of a large amount of literature, this topic cannot be left to sociological studies alone. Urban form is the consequence of architects’ and planners’ activities and if there is some intentionality in their work, the result must have some significance (Strappa, 2013). In the absence of a written code, it could be argued that there cannot be meaning in urban form: we hypothesize a code developed by city builders through history (Smith, 2007) and hidden in urban fabric, where sometimes anthropomorphic and zoomorphic patterns appear (Guidoni, 1976). Two sculpted felidae aside of a gate bear the same meaning, ‘be aware: this is an important entrance!’ in a pre-Columbian city, in medieval Bergamo, in III millennium B.C. Egypt and in the Yuan dynasty China. The discussion on the recipients of urban meaning is central: across time urban spaces can pursue different levels of meaning (Rossi, 1966) and be aimed at different classes of recipients, with different purposes: to orient, to symbolize political powers, or to express spatial exclusion and inclusion. Urban meaning must differ from architectural signs which refer to one building, one set of users and one owner; the meaning of urban form, instead, is related to collective entities. The paper will consider different theories, comparing a selection of meaningful case-studies, with a focus on communities where more importance is given to collective values (Strappa, 1995) outlining why urban meaning has become ancillary nowadays and why it should be included in urban morphology studies in the future.

Key Words: urban-morphology, urban-semiotics, urban-design, history, theory.

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