



# The *Hispanic International Seminar on Urban Form (ISUF-H)*. A platform for dialogue between urban planners and urban form researchers in Spanish-speaking countries

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is aimed at introducing the readers of *Planning Perspectives* to the Hispanic International Seminar on Urban Form (ISUF-H), a network for urban studies from morphological perspectives in Spanish-speaking countries. The platform is framed within the context of the research carried out at ISUF and its relationships with other schools and traditions of urban forms. The paper considers the themes and approaches presented at the ISUF-H conferences in Toledo (2016), Zaragoza (2018), Guadalajara-Mexico (2019), Barcelona (2020) and San José-Costa Rica (2021). In general, the diversity and vitality of research in the Spanish language is confirmed with the emergence and renewal of the themes and methodologies of analysis and eclectic approaches – with those of architects and urban planners dominating over those of geographers and specialists from other disciplines; this, in turn, demonstrates that barriers in the multidisciplinary dialogue remain and are an important challenge. Retrospective views and diagnoses based on the analysis of urban forms coexist with forward-looking views that consider current urban processes. The challenges of the ISUF-H are, therefore, akin to those of the ISUF, but also complementary, since they acknowledge the need to promote inclusive and multidisciplinary views over sectorial ones and to expand the anglophone field to include research carried out in Spanish-speaking countries.

## KEYWORDS

Urban morphology; urban studies; urban planning perspectives; Spain; Spanish-speaking countries

If geographical and disciplinary barriers to communication are large, those of language are arguably larger (Jeremy Whitehand, 1997)<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction. The Anglophone Squint

This quote by Jeremy Whitehand (1938–2021), the recently deceased father of contemporary urban morphology, highlights the fundamental problems that, in his opinion, urban studies generally face, especially those approached from a morphological perspective. His main thesis was that, despite the obvious growth in studies on urban forms, some barriers between geographical areas and disciplines remain, and that, despite the use of English as a lingua franca, linguistic and cultural barriers are still more important than geographical and discipline-related barriers.

This is a controversial thesis, since present-day urban form researchers and scholars have easier access than ever (certainly, in terms of before and after the development of the Internet) to works

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<sup>1</sup>Whitehand, "Why Urban Morphology?", 1.

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produced anywhere in the world; not just to the significant part of studies that are published in English, but also to material produced in non-anglophone countries. Whitehand and other authors have encouraged what is now an increasingly wider and more mature field of study, after the founding, at the end of the 1990s, of the journal *Urban Morphology*, and after ISUF conferences began to be held, thus demonstrating the global potential of this field of study. However, the prevalence of publications in English seemed to worry Whitehand more and more, as he saw a connection with the problem of ‘anglophone squint’.<sup>2</sup> The dominance of English-language literature in an otherwise excellent although outdated compilation available on the ISUF website under the title ‘Consolidated Urban Morphology Reading List’ is indicative, and a similar situation occurs with the Glossary, ‘a basic glossary of technical terms common principally in English-language studies’.<sup>3</sup>

However, the issue is not only about linguistic barriers, but also about disciplinary ones. As a recent article points out Whitehand’s approach to study urban form shows the centrality of a planning perspective, even if ‘few might think of Jeremy Whitehand as a planning historian’.<sup>4</sup> Curiously, this approach has been and still is dominant in the study of urban forms in Spanish-language research in the last decades. On the other hand, it is obvious that differences in the understanding of the nature of *planning* and, term with it is usually translated, *urbanismo* persist in both languages. This may partly explain the specificity of Hispanic studies.<sup>5</sup> The research and publications produced in the ISUF-H show interesting exchanges between morphologists and urban planners. Because of this *Planning Perspectives* readers would do well to pay more attention to the approximations and contributions in this ISUF ‘regional network’ (Figure 1).

## The British Conzenian and other schools of urban morphology

The convergence at the ISUF of two major schools of contemporary urban morphology, the British Conzenian school and the Italian Muratorian school, awakens interest.<sup>6</sup> Despite their different origins and natures, this meeting favoured the discovery of some significant convergences, which made it possible to enhance both approaches based on well-established disciplinary traditions. In particular, the historical-geographical approaches of the British school that started with M.R.G. Conzen (1907–2000) (or Anglo-German school, as its roots lay in the works of German-speaking geographers), continued and led by Whitehand, ‘shook hands’ with the typo-morphological and architectural approaches of Saverio Muratori (1910–1973), which were updated and systematised by Gianfranco Caniggia (1933–1987).<sup>7</sup> Therefore, this was a meeting of two national and disciplinary traditions: geography and architecture.

These two schools, however, also coexisted with the emergence of other studies on urban forms in different countries that played a key role in various disciplines. Anne Vernez Moudon identified a third school of urban morphology: the French school of Versailles.<sup>8</sup> In reality, this school included

<sup>2</sup>Whitehand, “The Problem of Anglophone Squint”. See also: Samuels, “Anglophone Squint and Transatlantic Myopia”; see also García-Ramón. “The Differences that Place Makes”.

<sup>3</sup>As the author, Peter Larkham, acknowledges. it “focuses particularly—although not exclusively—on English-language literature and on the Conzenian tradition”. Consolidated Urban Morphology Reading List. <http://www.urbanform.org/bibliography.html> (1990). Accessed 1/02/2022.

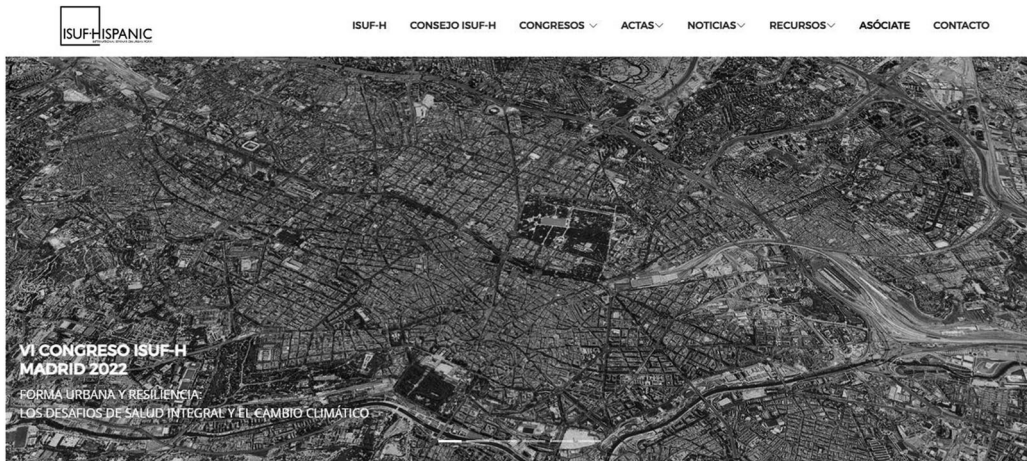
<sup>4</sup>Larkham, “Planning History and Everyday Urban Change”.

<sup>5</sup>Hebbert, “Town Planning versus Urbanismo”; Monclús and Díez-Medina, “Urbanisme, Urbanismo, Urbanistica”.

<sup>6</sup>Cataldi, “Translating ‘Alnwick’ into Italian: A Tribute to M. R. G. Conzen”.

<sup>7</sup>Regarding the “Italian school”, although the influence of the line of analysis on urban fabrics is unarguable, the wide array of approaches by architects and historians such as A. Rossi and C. Aymonino, among others, are also worth noting. See Marzot, “The Study of Urban Form in Italy”.

<sup>8</sup>Moudon, “Urban Morphology as an Emerging Interdisciplinary Field”.



**Figure 1.** ISUF-H website home page. <https://isufh.org/>.

some concepts from the Italian school, which made it, to a certain extent, a replacement and development of said school from the 1970s onwards. However, this school, which emerged at the School of Architecture of Versailles and was led by the architects Philippe Panerai and Jean Castex and the anthropologist Jean Charles Depaule, turned out to be significantly more diverse and multifaceted thanks to the contributions of Pierre Pinon, Bruno Fortier and many other architects and urban planners, and which made some question the existence of an actual French school of urban morphology.<sup>9</sup> In addition to the works of architects, the refreshing studies of urban historians and geographers, such as Marcel Roncayolo (1916–2018), appeared in these same years and their influence on the ‘interpretation of cities’ went beyond those traditional disciplinary spheres, leading to a significant renewal of urban history.<sup>10</sup>

The third ISUF conference was held in Versailles in 1998 (after those in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1996 and Birmingham, U.K., in 1997). However, the legacy of this conference and French studies on urban morphology did not translate into relevant contributions with the appropriate quantitative influence in the context of the International Seminar of Urban Form. In addition, despite the considerable renewal of research papers published in French in the 1970s and 1980s, these were not accessible in English until over 20 years later, as was the case with the influential book by Panerai, Castex and Depaule, *Formes urbaines: de l’ilot à la barre*, which attempted to link morphological analysis with the recovery of traditional urban forms.<sup>11</sup>

It is also worth noting the important Dutch tradition, which developed urban morphology studies by combining Italian approaches and enriching them with the *stadsanalyse* tradition, and which was associated with urban renewal processes in cities in the Netherlands. In that case, the availability of the German edition of the book by Aldo Rossi (*Die Architektur der Stadt*, 1972)

<sup>9</sup>Darin, “The Study of Urban Form in France”.

<sup>10</sup>His ideas on forms, functions and times of the city are of particular interest: “... elles ne procèdent pas de la fonction : formes et fonctions ont une autonomie relative” (forms do not come from functions: forms and functions own relative autonomy). Roncayolo, *L’abécédaire*. See also: M. Roncayolo, *Lectures de villes*.

<sup>11</sup>Panerai, Castex, and Depaule, *Formes urbaines*. Translated first in Spanish (1986) and much later into English with a more deliberate title: *Urban Forms: the Death and Life of the Urban Block* (2004). See Monclús, “Formas Urbanas. De la Manzana al Bloque Revisitado”. For a more general overview of the issue see: Díez Medina and Monclús, *Ciudad de bloques: Reflexiones retrospectivas y prospectivas sobre los polígonos de vivienda “modernos”* (book review in *Planning Perspectives*, 36 21 4 2021).

or the Dutch version of the aforementioned book by Panerai, Castex and Depaule (1984) resulted in a close connection between the studies of urban morphologists and urban planners.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, there were innovative works on urban morphology as noteworthy as those that dealt with the Dutch urban block, including the appropriate atlas, and others interested in the updating potential and capacity of traditional urban forms.<sup>13</sup> After a first meeting at the ISUF conference in Groningen in 2000, the growth of this school paved the way for other studies and for a second larger meeting at the Delft University of Technology in 2012. In this case, the dominant role of architects's and urban planners's interests was obvious, to the extent that some authors expressed their doubts about the drifting of the focus on urban morphology towards the field of urban planning and practice.<sup>14</sup> However, some of the most innovative contributions were generated precisely in research by design, a method traditionally used in international urban planning and design culture.<sup>15</sup>

The identification of the different schools of urban morphology or, more specifically, the traditions of the study of urban form, actually depends on the disciplinary and its spatio-temporal particularities. Thus, it is obvious that, if studied in relation to the historiography of geography, the German tradition comes first, followed by the French, the British, the American or the Spanish ones.<sup>16</sup> However, if the historiography of architecture and urban planning are foregrounded, the Italian school stands out for its important contributions from the 1960s onwards.<sup>17</sup>

### Spanish studies on urban form

As for the Spanish context, it is interesting to consider a process that, to some extent, was similar to the French and Dutch cases regarding the role of architects in the new generation of urban morphology studies from the 1970s onwards. However, studies on urban form have their roots in several disciplinary traditions, such as Anglo-Saxon urban geography, French geography and urban sociology, urban history and the morphological approaches of Italian architects. The first studies on urban form were actually connected to the emergence of modern urban planning at the turn of the twentieth century. As in other countries, architects and urban planners interpreted cities from a morphological approach, following the pioneering work of the German architect Oskar Jürgens, *Ciudades Españolas: su Desarrollo y Configuración Urbanística*.<sup>18</sup>

The field of study on urban form represents an important development in the sphere of geography. Several works on cities and neighbourhoods following morphological approaches – clearly influenced by the German and French schools of geography – appeared in the middle of the twentieth century, such as the articles published in the journal *Estudios Geográficos* from the 1950s onwards or other monographs such as the influential work on Granada by Joaquín Bosque (1924–2015).<sup>19</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, more specific works on urban forms were published, paying special attention to the processes driven by various urban agents (owners and developers, the impact of urban planning designs and projects, etc.), such as those by Rafael Mas on the *Ensanche*

<sup>12</sup>Marzot, Cavallo, and Komossa, "The Study of Urban Form in the Netherlands".

<sup>13</sup>Komossa, *Atlas of The Dutch Urban Block*.

<sup>14</sup>"Disappointingly, much of the conference dialogue drifted away from a focus on urban morphology and more directly into the realms of urban design and practice". McClure, "Nineteenth International Seminar on Urban Form, Delft, The Netherlands".

<sup>15</sup>Viganò, *The Territories of Urbanism. The Project as Knowledge Producer*.

<sup>16</sup>According to Capel, *Morfología de las Ciudades* (vol. I), 230–30.

<sup>17</sup>Marzot, "The Study of Urban Form in Italy".

<sup>18</sup>Jürgens, *Ciudades Españolas: su Desarrollo y Configuración Urbanística*. (first published in German: *Spanische Stadte: Ihre Bauliche Entwicklung Und Ausgestaltung*, 1926).

<sup>19</sup>Bosque, *Geografía Urbana de Granada*.

(extension district) of Madrid.<sup>20</sup> From this point on, it could be said that morphological studies in the field of urban geography were consolidated during the 1980s and 1990s, and that this phenomenon shaped the development of journals such as *Historia Urbana*, where a first article by Whitehand was published in Spanish.<sup>21</sup>

Studies addressing urban form were also developed in the field of history of urban planning, which is only partially connected to urban history, to art history and architecture. In this respect, the work by Fernando Terán, an urban planner with important responsibilities in public administration during the 1960s and 1970s and also a historian of the recent history of urban planning in Spain<sup>22</sup> is very relevant; it was a milestone in the field with considerable domestic impact but, as it was not translated into English, had little international resonance.<sup>23</sup> Some initiatives at the beginning of the 1980s attempted to promote common ground between urban planners and historians, with renewed attention on urban forms. One example would be urban planning and history symposiums, such as the one held under this title in Madrid in 1982 that brought together an elite group of scholars in order to support interdisciplinary convergence.<sup>24</sup>

In the 1970s, and again in the field of architects and urban planners, renewed approaches to the study of urban forms emerged. This was, in part, a reaction to the dominant concepts of functionalist urban planning, through the absorption of morphological approaches into Italian architectural and urban planning culture, which, in turn, led to new variations of ‘morphological urban planning’.<sup>25</sup> In a second phase, there were new dialogues with the approaches of the French school, and more original contributions appeared closely linked to new urban designs.<sup>26</sup> It is therefore possible to recognize the mutual influences and the similarities of morphological approaches, especially through the Laboratorio de Urbanism de Barcelona (LUB), founded in 1969 and led by Manuel de Solà-Morales (1939–2012).<sup>27</sup> Studies on ‘forms of urban growth’, the *Ensanche* of Barcelona, housing estates and informal settlement forms were important and refreshing contributions in the 1970s that were extended in later studies with broader morphological perspectives. There was also a certain closeness to the French school of Versailles, through the Spanish edition of the book *Formas Urbanas* (1986) that spread the approach of French authors. However, although theories about urban forms clearly began at the School of Architecture of Barcelona, it was in Madrid that the adoption of the morphological perspective had an important impact, with the exceptional work on the morphology of residential peripheries and the new urban plan for Madrid, which was approved in 1985.<sup>28</sup>

Regarding contributions from Latin American countries, there was a significant shift from the final decades of the twentieth century onwards, especially in the field of geography and urban history, but also in the field of architecture and urban planning. In this sense, it is not easy to distinguish the approaches in Portuguese (Brazil) from those produced by Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America (as can be seen, for example, in the networks led by Horacio Capel,

<sup>20</sup>Mas, *El Barrio de Salamanca*.

<sup>21</sup>Vilagrà, “The Study of Urban Form in Spain”. Vilagrà, Interview to Whitehand in *Revista Catalana de Geografia*, n° 8, 1989, pp. 21–28. See also Whitehand, “Formas de renovación urbana en Gran Bretaña”.

<sup>22</sup>Terán, *Planeamiento Urbano en España*.

<sup>23</sup>See the monographic issue of the journal *Ciudad y Territorio* dedicated to Fernando Terán, especially the article by Ezquiaga, “Genealogía de los paradigmas para una teoría del planteamiento en el pensamiento de Fernando Terán”.

<sup>24</sup>Bonet, *Urbanismo e Historia Urbana en el Mundo Hispano*.

<sup>25</sup>Sainz, *El Proyecto Urbano en España*.

<sup>26</sup>Linazasoro, *Permanencias y Arquitectura Urbana*.

<sup>27</sup>De Solà-Morales, *Fornas de crecimiento urbano*. De Solà-Morales. *Miradas sobre la Ciudad*.

<sup>28</sup>García Pablos, “Morfología Urbana”. See also: Laboratorio de Urbanismo de Barcelona. *Readings on Cerdà and the Extension Plan of Barcelona*.



including contributions from both sides of the Atlantic).<sup>29</sup> Perhaps it is in the field of urban cultural history where works with a panoramic Latin American perspective, such as those by Arturo Almandoz, are most thought-provoking and innovative for understanding the processes and urban forms in different cultural contexts. The latter, however, show very striking similarities in terms of the forms of modernization that explain the change from post-colonial cities to modern Latin American metropolitan areas.<sup>30</sup> In any case, lack of space here precludes my reviewing here some important works on urban morphology publications in Latin America. Consequently, the rest of the paper only focuses on some Spanish urban morphology contributions.

In conclusion, as the geographer Joan Vilagrasa (1953–2003) said in his essay from 1998, urban morphology in Spain, which is also applicable to Latin America, ‘is nowhere but also everywhere’,<sup>31</sup> that is, it does not constitute a specific field, although it is present in various fields and publications in several disciplines. The question is whether a convergence between these traditions is taking place and whether multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary views in the study of urban forms are advancing.

### ISUF regional networks and ISUF-H

Based on Whitehand’s diagnosis of the need to overcome linguistic barriers, he considered it unlikely that the creation of national networks could provide clear solutions, and yet he supported the creation of ‘regional networks’.<sup>32</sup> At the same time he supported independent forums of conventional organizations (such as the International Geographical Union), which would promote the more or less spontaneous development of international groups of researchers and professionals, founding the Birmingham’s Urban Morphology Research Group (UMRG). A successful example would be the International Seminar of Urban Form (ISUF), founded in 1994, and of which he was one of the early leaders. Whitehand was really interested in checking the international character of the group’s journal, *Urban Morphology*, calculating that half of them came from non-anglophone countries (between 1997 and 2004).<sup>33</sup> He later estimated a slight fall in the proportion of non-English countries to 40% in 2008–2017, with a rise in proportion of articles from China and the Portuguese-speaking countries and the decline in the number from Germany and France.<sup>34</sup>

Despite Whitehand’s prediction, a few years after his article on the ‘anglophone squint’ appeared in 2005, ‘regional networks’ started to be founded, generally, but not always, based in ‘regions’ or countries that more or less coincide with linguistic areas. The Nordic Network of Urban Morphology was established in 2006, followed, in 2007, by the Italian Network of Urban Morphology (ISUF Italy). Other networks emerged later, such as the Chinese Network of Urban Morphology (CNUM), the Cypriot Network of Urban Morphology (CyNUM), or the Polish Network of Urban Morphology (ISUF Polska), amongst others.<sup>35</sup> Some of these networks went beyond the national scope and extended to a larger linguistic and cultural area and, therefore, shared certain

<sup>29</sup>Geo Crítica (1976–1994): <https://raco.cat/index.php/GeoCritica/issue/archive> *Biblio3W Revista Bibliográfica de Geografía y Ciencias Sociales* (2007–2021).

<sup>30</sup>Almandoz, *Modernización Urbana en América Latina*. See also: Almandoz, *Planning Latin America’s Capital Cities*.

<sup>31</sup>Vilagrasa, “The Study of Urban Form in Spain”.

<sup>32</sup>“A major part of the solution is unlikely to be provided by nationally-based organizations and their journals, controlled as they are by members and interest groups from their respective countries”. Whitehand, “The Problem of Anglophone Squint”.

<sup>33</sup>According to Whitehand: “Though it is published exclusively in English, and has been included in the ISI’s coverage since 2001, 65 per cent of the authors of articles during the first 8 years of publication, 1997–2004, were affiliated to institutions in non-anglophone countries”. Whitehand, “The Problem of Anglophone Squint”.

<sup>34</sup>Whitehand, “Urban Morphology”.

<sup>35</sup><http://www.urbanform.org/regional.html>.

similarities with what had happened in the anglophone world. This was the case of the Portuguese-Language Network of Urban Morphology (PNUM), which was founded in 2010 and which covered the lusophone area, that is, basically, Portugal and Brazil.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, this was also the case with the Hispanic International Seminar on Urban Form (ISUF-H), a platform founded in 2015 for the study of urban morphology and dialogue between Spanish-speaking countries, that is to say, practically the rest of Latin America.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, there is no 'Iberian school' beyond possible collaborations and meetings between both networks, as was the case with the ISUF-H and the ISUF Italy. Both networks share the objective of promoting studies on urban form in their respective linguistic spheres, while contributing to the greater internationalism of the ISUF.

The creation of ISUF-H, aimed at providing a platform for everyone interested in urban forms with a broad morphological perspective, should be understood in this context.<sup>38</sup> As is the case across the general field of studies included in the ISUF's work, a wide diversity of approaches and themes is covered. We can consider with some endeavours to interpret and systematise lines of research in order to 'map' them, as various authors, from different national and cultural contexts, have done. In our case, we could update the lines identified by Joan Vilagrasa for Spain by analysing the ISUF-H conferences that have been held to date. Using this method, large thematic blocks may appear covering approaches as varying as those included by Pierre Gauthier and Jason Gilliland in an original mapping project that distinguishes between 'cognitive' and 'normative' studies, and also between those that consider the urban form as a 'product' or as an 'independent variable'.<sup>39</sup> This classification could be complementary to others based on certain themes and morphological components in which excessive differences are not observed between the Spanish contributions with respect to those from other countries.<sup>40</sup>

The first thematic block would include contributions regarding urban processes from a historical perspective, generally from the discipline of contemporary history and art history and architecture. This block appears in ISUF-H conferences under the name 'History of Urban Form', although it is often linked to the Theories and the History of Urban Planning.

The second block could include more specific lines of research about the transformations of urban forms, with a focus on the agents and policies that form their foundations. This confirms the relevance of urban geography perspectives, although historical geography tends to converge and be confused with urban history.

The third block would include works focused on the architectural aspect of the city, with special attention to morpho-typological processes, but also including innovative contributions about forms of land, of buildings (especially regarding housing and forms of grouping) and of public spaces; a standard field in the works of architects and urban planners.

The fourth block could include works on the social dimension of urban forms, that is, those that deal with socio-spatial segregation, urban vulnerability and inequality between central and peripheral areas, urban regeneration strategies, etc. In the case of Latin American cities, the analysis of informal urbanization phenomena is particularly relevant

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<sup>36</sup>Oliveira et al., "The Study of Urban Form in Portugal".

<sup>37</sup>ISUF-H, the Hispanic branch of the ISUF, was founded in 2015 by 50 members of several universities and institutions in Argentina, Chile, Spain, U.S.A and Mexico.

<sup>38</sup>The term "Hispanic", according to the Oxford Dictionary, means "Relating to Spain or to Spanish-speaking countries, especially those of Central and South America". However, according to the Real Academia Española, it means "Belonging to or relating to Spain and Spanish-speaking countries and cultures".

<sup>39</sup>Gauthier and Gilliland, "Mapping Urban Morphology".

<sup>40</sup>Barke, "An End to Spain's Urban Morphological Isolation?"

The fifth block would cover urban management systems by analysing the role of urban plans and projects, and also the legislation and the determining factors of urban and regional structures connected to the increasingly complex functional and socio-economic determining factors.

The sixth block would encompass topics related to sustainability, urban metabolism, compact cities, new suburbs and peri-urbanization, changes to the land and the landscape, with a special focus on metropolitan phenomena, natural systems and hybridization between urban systems and open spaces, etc.

The seventh, and final, block could include explorations using new analysis tools, in keeping with digital disruption, with advanced mapping and big data. Configurational approaches, for example using Space Syntax as a key concept in the analysis of accessibility and other components of urban structures, would also be covered by this block, as well as many other big data applications that enable the qualitative and quantitative characterization of urban structures and forms in truly innovative ways.

In general, this review confirms the diversity and vitality of research in the Spanish language with the emergence and renewal of themes and methodologies of analysis.<sup>41</sup> However, as with the ISUF Valencia Conference 2017, it is true that many contributions ‘were concerned with very general morphological topics rather than with the detailed analysis of morphological components’ as Michael Barke said in his conference report. Furthermore, arguably, a sort of ‘planning perspective’, that is interested in the practical applications of urban morphological research and using urban morphology as a ‘tool’ rather than as an end in itself, was dominant at that time.<sup>42</sup> The papers presented at successive ISUF-H conferences exhibit a conceptual and methodological eclecticism, with the approaches of architects and urban planners dominating those of geographers and specialists from other disciplines, and an excessive influence of local studies over comparative approaches. Therefore, a distinctive feature of contributions at ISUF-H conferences may be the coexistence of retrospective views and diagnoses based on the analysis of urban forms and of forward-looking views that consider current urban processes, something that also occurs in other publications in the field of history of urban planning.<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusions

What can be said about the challenges and opportunities afforded by the ISUF-H? Again, as at the ISUF, ‘urban morphology means different things to different people’.<sup>44</sup> This could be a weakness, but also a strength in this ‘regional network’ for researchers and professionals involved in the broad world of urban forms in Spain and Latin American countries.

As Whitehand stated out of a concern to make urban morphology studies more interdisciplinary and more international, ‘attempts to rectify anglophone squint require efforts by both anglophones and non-anglophones’.<sup>45</sup> It also brings to light the need to progress towards convergence between disciplines and with truly international perspectives.<sup>46</sup> So the challenges for the ISUF and ISUF-H

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<sup>41</sup>The proceedings of four of the conferences held (Toledo 2016; ISUF-H Zaragoza 2018; ISUF-H Guadalajara 2019; ISUF-H Barcelona 2020) are available at the ISUF-H website: <https://isufh.org/>. Reports on the conferences can be found in *Urban Morphology* 2017 21.1; 2019 23.1; 2021 25.2.

<sup>42</sup>Barke, “An End to Spain’s Urban Morphological Isolation?”

<sup>43</sup>With an innovative use of key concepts using a planning perspective such as the transformations or urban and peri-urban fringes: De Las Rivas and Fernández-Maroto, “Planning Strategies for a Resilient Urban Fringe in Three Medium-Sized Spanish Cities”.

<sup>44</sup>Barke, “Why Study Urban Morphology?”

<sup>45</sup>Whitehand, “The Problem of Anglophone Squint”.

<sup>46</sup>Whitehand, “Urban Morphology”



are not so different. In fact, both the increasingly greater presence of advanced analytical tools and the growing awareness of environmental and social challenges are directly mirrored in the perspectives and contributions at the latest ISUF conferences, in particular, the 28th International Seminar on Urban Form held recently in Glasgow (June 2021), with the general theme ‘Urban Form and the Sustainable Prosperous City’. This is an umbrella concept that addresses the role of urban morphology in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals proposed by the United Nations and included in various Urban Agendas (European, national and local).<sup>47</sup> Research into urban forms is a flourishing field of convergence and multidisciplinary dialogue which, nevertheless, still needs to overcome the barriers posed by the latter: this constitutes a clear challenge for both ISUF and ISUF-H. In any case, the overcoming of linguistic and disciplinary barriers continues to be a fundamental challenge for both networks. The development of this latest platform could and should help to intensify dialogue between urban planners and urban form scholars, both in anglophone and in Spanish-speaking spheres. The condition is that this dialogue should take place in both languages at the same time. However, it is acknowledged that the most global conversation will, take place in English.

Several authors have enhanced the need to advance the relationship between research and practice in urban morphology.<sup>48</sup> As one of the recommendations of the ISUF Task Force chaired by morphologist Ivor Samuels stated ‘the most valuable contribution urban morphology can make is to an objective understanding of urban form and how it has evolved’.<sup>49</sup> This characteristic approach of many morphological studies in the ISUF-H may foster further interdisciplinary convergence. Even if there is not a consolidated school with a tradition of studies on urban forms in Spanish-speaking countries, morphological perspectives have been constant since the beginning of ‘urbanism’ as a discipline. As happens in the field of urban planning, urban morphology could be seen as some kind of ‘urban knowledge’ that, as Bernardo Secchi (1934–2014) said, is ‘probably less elegant than a science’, but perhaps more effective and realistic. The ISUF-H is therefore trying to become a forum for different types of urban knowledge: a platform for dialogue between urban planners and researchers on urban form in Spanish-speaking countries.

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<sup>47</sup>Monclús and Ruíz-Apelaniz eds., *Forma urbana y objetivos de desarrollo sostenible* (Urban form and sustainable development goals).

<sup>48</sup>Oliveira, “Morphological Research in Practice.”

<sup>49</sup>Samuels, “ISUF Task Force on Research and Practice in Urban Morphology: An Interim Report”.

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