

Assessing a quarter-century of *Urban Morphology*

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Urban Morphology has now reached its quarter-century anniversary: 25 years and 50 issues. This review article examines the journal's progress during this period and considers its future prospects.¹

Origins and production

Urban Morphology arose from discussions during the first meetings of a small international and interdisciplinary group of people interested in the academic study of urban form and its applications to practice. An initial conference, held in Birmingham in 1990, led to an edited book (Whitehand and Larkham, 1992). Subsequent meetings, of 20-30 people, were held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in the early/mid 1990s and, after some debate, the group called itself the International Seminar on Urban Form – ISUF. After the first three such small meetings the group agreed to convene a larger conference, which was organised by Jeremy Whitehand and held at the University of Birmingham in 1997. Additional discussions led to the agreement to launch a journal, *Urban Morphology*, and its first issue appeared in September 1997. The journal was edited by Jeremy Whitehand, who continued in that role until vol. 23(2) in 2019. This paper reviews the first quarter-century of the journal, shaped largely by Jeremy's search for interesting new content, his sharp editorial eye and attention to detail, and his concern for clear and unambiguous communication.

The rationale for the journal was set out in its first Editorial (Whitehand, 1997). There was growing evidence that scholarly interest in urban forms was more widespread than had been recognised by its scattered practitioners, who were largely working in isolation. Settlement studies tended to be seen as intrinsically very local. Wider comparisons between countries, let alone cultures, were rare. There was a gap between traditions of study from 'the most quantitative extremes of the social sciences to the most qualitative of the arts and humanities', which needed to be bridged, as did the gap between the various conceptual frameworks and terminologies used. A final problem was the language used for publication: usually the first language of the author, and so studies were often 'read by only a minority, sometimes a tiny minority, of those researching the same, or a similar, topic in a different geographical area'. These concerns have underpinned the journal, and ISUF more widely, ever since.

The journal began, as did most new journals at the time, on a very small-scale basis – almost a 'cottage industry', led by Whitehand and a small editorial and production team. Two issues a year were planned, with perhaps three academic papers, shorter Viewpoints, reviews and relevant news items in each issue. In part this was constrained by ISUF's finances: this was, and still is, a publication entirely funded by ISUF membership fees and surpluses from ISUF's conferences. Yet the person-time input in editing and putting together the journal was – and again still is – voluntary, the costs are incurred entirely in printing and distribution. In the early days of production, copy was word processed (using WordPerfect), often typed from heavily-annotated manuscripts, and once the text and illustrations were approved, pages were laid out through a laborious cut-and-paste process for camera-ready printing.

Illustrations were a particular problem. Although an A4 size had been deliberately chosen to allow larger illustrations than most contemporary journals, much of the copy received was not of publishable quality and there was much to-and-fro communication between editor and author simply to ensure that all necessary information (such as orientation, scale, keys and captions) was supplied. Even then, many had to be redrawn to be clear and legible at publication size, thanks to the staff of the Drawing Office of the School of Geography at the University of Birmingham. The journal was supported by substantial hidden subsidies of this nature, especially in these early years.

As ISUF had decided that English was to be the language of publication, particular attention was paid to encouraging contributions from authors for whom English was not their first language. Although ISUF could not fund translation, Jeremy himself spent much time seeking to improve the written English of early drafts, particularly of reviewers had suggested that the ideas were worth publishing. Again this could be a lengthy to-and-fro process, sometimes delaying papers by a significant time. There was an editorial concern that the sense of the paper should not be changed by editorial intervention, but that each phrase and sentence should be clearly expressed in correct English grammar, and be unambiguous. However, on one occasion an author withdrew an amended paper as he felt that it was no longer expressed in his voice. Once improved and approved, the typescript was passed over for word processing, and transcribing Jeremy's annotations and amendments could be time-consuming. Most published papers were changed, most to their significant benefit: but none received the dramatic – but very carefully thought-through – treatment meted out to an author when Jeremy edited another journal for the Institute of British Geographers, when every word on the first page of the typescript was carefully crossed out with the sole exception of the first word, 'The'.

The rigorous review process has led to a consistent rejection rate between 70 and 80 per cent in recent years. The mean time-lag between the receipt of a paper from an author and the communication of a decision to that author was 40-50 days, although decisions on unsuitable papers are often made within 1-3 days. The review process has been slower than normal during the COVID crisis period. The mean time-lag between receipt of the revised version of an article and its publication was 3-5 months. This compares very well to many print-based journals in our disciplines.

This production approach still continues, although the current printer, Henry Ling Ltd (one of the UK's largest academic journal and book printers) now takes Word files, produces full page proofs, prints and distributes copies direct to members. While more expensive, this is cost- and time-efficient. Working with this company has allowed the journal to move from stapled to the more attractive perfect (glued) binding (from vol. 9, allowing a title on the spine), and introducing colour printing (vol. 13) to a point where colour is common (from vol. 18, although authors pay the extra costs of colour).

The journal has increased in size over the years (Figure 1), funded by continued growth of ISUF membership and, particularly, its conferences; and by a continued flow of good-quality papers. It has published 156 refereed academic papers. There has been a slight increase in the average number of pages per paper, and a definite increase in the number and size of illustrations. Nevertheless resources – and paper submissions – still only support two issues per year: we remain a small-scale specialist journal. Yet its regularity of production and quality have led to its acceptance by a variety of indexing and abstracting services, still useful even with today's online search mechanisms, including Scopus, the Arts & Humanities Citation Index and Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals (see inner front cover) and its recognition by national bodies such as Anvur (the Italian national institution for the evaluation of the quality of scientific research).

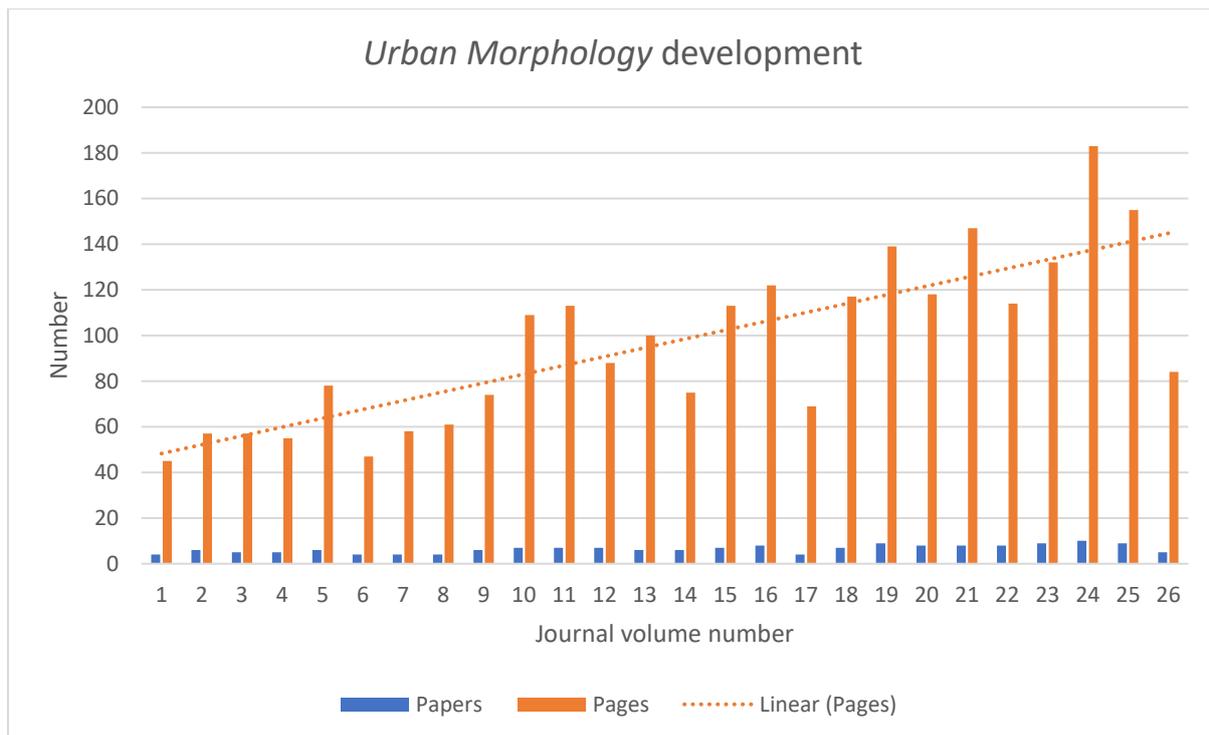


Figure 1. The development of the journal.

Crucial in maintaining academic quality are the independent peer review process, and a broad-based and expert Editorial Board. Rigorous reviewing has led to a high rejection rate, consistently around 75-80 per cent in recent years. Many reviewers are generous with their time and produce copious and detailed advice to authors, including those whose papers are rejected. Some of these are restructured, rewritten resubmitted and eventually published. Others, little if any altered, are offered to other journals (and I have sometimes been asked to review them). Likewise we receive some submissions that have clearly been written for, and rejected by, other journals: if they are not written in this journal's style and with its special focus, they are swiftly rejected. Another source of rejections, increasing in recent years, are papers derived from PhD theses, often with little editing. Most originate in countries that require PhD candidates to publish in international journals, as well as producing an acceptable thesis, before the degree is conferred.

The journal's success, as well as its membership mailing list, results in frequent approaches from a variety of commercial journal publishers offering to purchase the journal, to take on its management, and so on. Yet all such offers would inevitably result in a substantial enlargement of the journal, a dilution of its unique focus, an increase in its cost to readers, and all have been rejected by the Editorial Board.

Authorship

Authorship of those 156 major papers and the 214 shorter Viewpoints shows some interesting patterns. The vast number of authors publish only once in the journal. A very small number are prolific authors, and as might be expected these are amongst the long-term core members of ISUF: Oliveira (19 contributions), Cataldi (16), Larkham and Samuels (14 each), Kropf (13) and M. P. Conzen and Whitehand (10 each, excluding Whitehand's Editorials) (Figure 2). While this shows a welcome diversity of authorship, failure to return is an ISUF problem, also faced by its annual conferences. A perception that there is too much focus on a small number of voices, however relevant and high quality their output, may also be a danger.

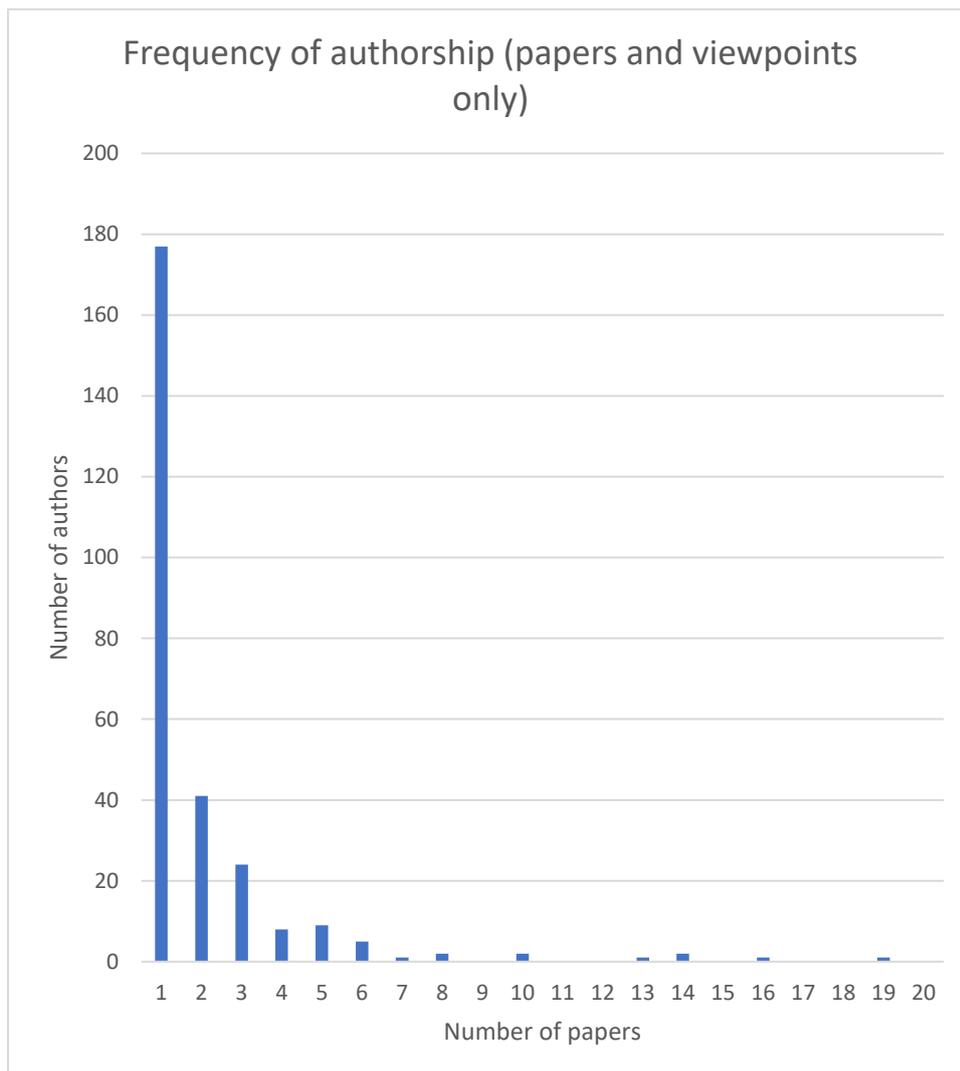


Figure 2. Frequency of authorship (papers and viewpoints only)

From the published author affiliations it is possible to reconstruct their ‘disciplinary origins’, although this is a dubious construct as it relates principally to the name of a university department at the time of publication: people do change departments, departments are merged and change names, current employment may not relate to discipline of author’s qualifications, and some are not readily identifiable. Even so, Figure 3 shows a remarkable disciplinary dominance of authors with architectural affiliations (43 per cent), although this includes dual-discipline departments such as architecture and landscape, architecture and urbanism and so on. The next-largest group is from geography (21 per cent) primarily representing the largely UK-based historico-geographical or ‘Conzenian’ research tradition. History gains only a tiny representation, surprising given the historical focus of so many papers. Also surprising is the small representation from computer science, given the rapid rise in computational studies of urban form (see D’Acci, 2019), although most such studies are published in journals such as *Environment and Planning B*.

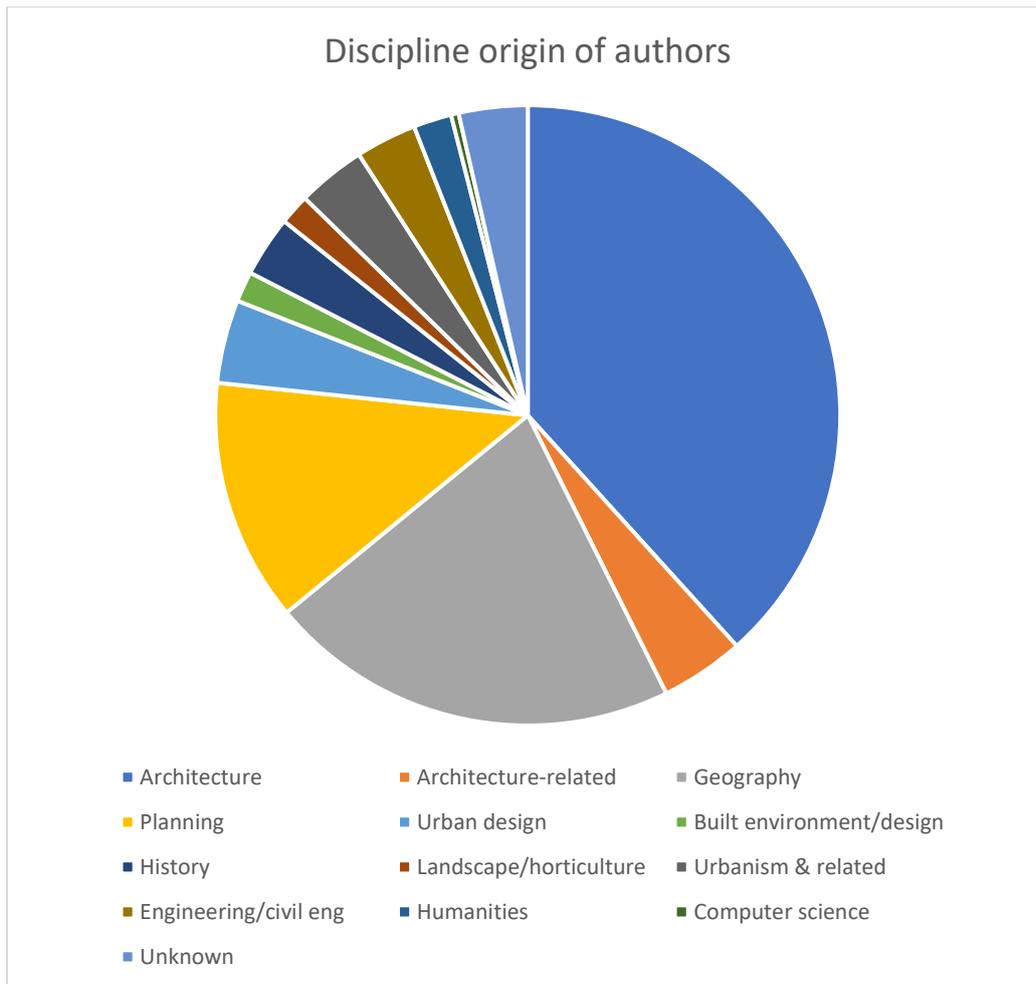


Figure 3. Disciplinary origin of authors of main papers.

Although there is a clear trend towards multiple authorship of papers, this is a field dominated by single authorship until very recently (Figure 4). A ‘heatmap’ produced by the citation analysis software VOSviewer suggests very few clusters of authorship, reinforcing the view that urban morphology research is still a rather diffuse and rather small-scale operation (Figure 5).

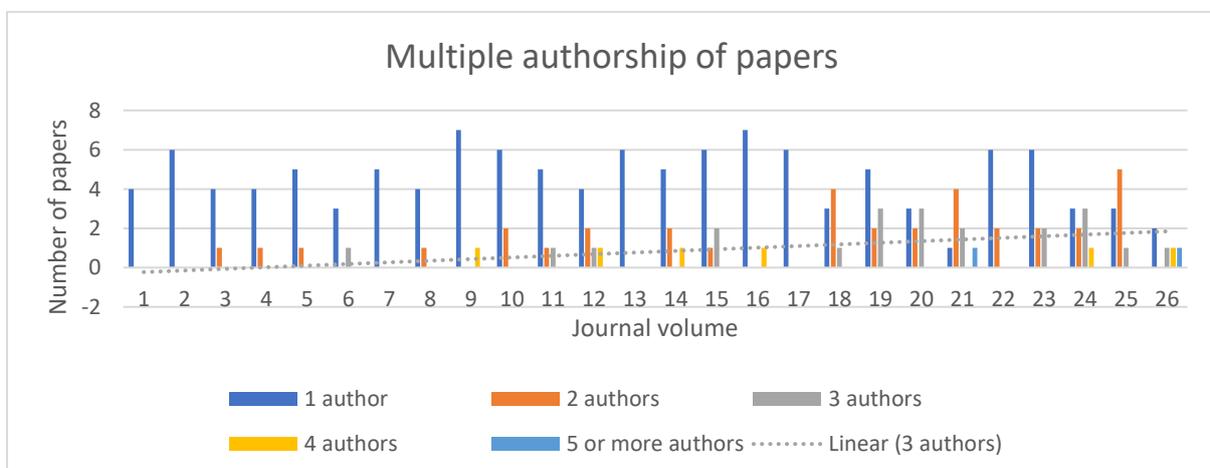


Figure 4. Multiple authorship of main papers.

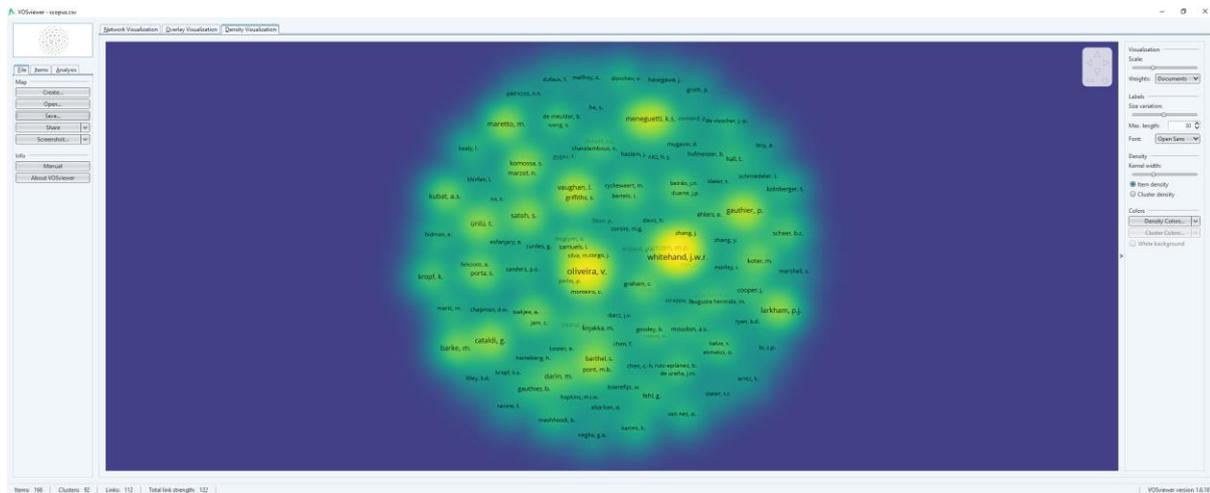


Figure 5. Heat map of authorship (restricted to papers accessible to VOSviewer software)

Topics

The topics of published papers are widely spread (Table 1). Early concerns for the nature of the discipline, its philosophy and the various research traditions have tailed off, and reflect a concern for establishing the field of study. Within this theme should be considered the journal's only deliberate connected series of papers, country-based explorations of the study of urban form (and two papers related to this series) (Table 2). Early papers in this series were commissioned by the editor, but more recent ones have been offered in the usual way. While a good range of countries and national traditions of study have been covered, early papers may now be dated and there are substantial gaps in the coverage which, however, reflect gaps in ISUF's membership. South America, Africa and much of Asia remain un- or under-represented, with China a particular gap given the recent rise in main papers on Chinese urban morphology. Oliveira (2017) categorised and discussed the first 14 papers in this series and explored their impact through citation analysis: a decade later there has been substantial change in this measure of impact (Table 2 and see below).

Table 1. Themes of published papers (excludes review articles etc)

| Broad theme of papers | Number |
|-----------------------------------|--------|
| Nature of urban morphology | 1 |
| Study of urban form | 19 |
| Philosophy of urban morphology | 2 |
| Traditions of morphological study | 8 |
| Theory of urban morphology | 11 |
| Research techniques & methods | 42 |
| Morphology and practice | 5 |
| Historical urban form studies | 51 |
| Contemporary urban form studies | 5 |
| Future urban form studies | 0 |
| Other | 20 |

Table 2. The study of urban form series of papers.

| Vol(issue) | Country | Citations (Google Scholar) |
|----------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 2(1) | Spain | 39 |
| 2(2) | France | 74 |
| 5(1) | USA | 139 |
| 6(2) | Italy | 106 |
| 8(1) | Germany | 71 |
| 10(1) | Canada | 26 |
| 10(2) | Australia | 16 |
| 10(2) | UK | 110 |
| 12(1) | Ireland | |
| 13(2) | Sweden | 10 |
| 14(1) | Turkey | 25 |
| 14(2) | Poland | 19 |
| 16(2) | S Korea | 25 |
| 18(2) | Brazil | 15 |
| 19(2) | Japan | 2 |
| 20(1) | Netherlands | 1 |
| 26(1) | Iran | |
| Related papers | | |
| 10(1) | Mapping urban morphology | 137 |
| 17(2) | Overview of series | 8 |

Table 1, although a crude categorization, reveals two substantial areas of attention and several surprising gaps. Research techniques and methods account for 26 per cent of categorized papers. This should not be surprising: in part this reflects further efforts to establish the credentials of the discipline, and potentially to broaden the international comparative scope of studies, something often recommended by M. R. G. Conzen. However the largest focus of papers is historical studies of urban form (31 per cent). This may reflect a focus of the historico-geographical research tradition, or a wider fascination with local and urban history: but it is nevertheless surprising that morphological concerns and analyses have been applied much less frequently to the contemporary city and not at all to the future city (although some papers on planning and urban design are in the ‘other’ category).

Impact

There is more to ‘research impact’ than citations (for example in the UK see Research England, 2019, Annex A Table 1), however as this is primarily an academic refereed journal, this is the primary means of considering the effect of its publications on its main intended readership. The shortcomings of citation analysis have long been known (see, for example, Griffith *et al.*, 1977) but this nevertheless provides a measurable indicator that papers are known and used in subsequent publications. However, technology is changing the nature of academic publication and thus citation analysis. The rapidly-increasing number of journals and papers means more citations, appearing more swiftly after publication of the work, and publications can be much

more readily identified through full-text online searches. When Jeremy Whitehand wrote about citation analysis in geography, a scholar receiving over 10 citations to their work was noteworthy, indeed ‘remarkable’, and there were only 32 of these “citation centurions” in human geography by 1985 (Whitehand, 1985, Table 1). Currently there are thousands, and the highest-ranked academic, H. J. Kim of Kyungbook National University, South Korea, gained 203,268 citations in the last five years alone (AD Scientific Index, 2022). *Urban Morphology* is not in this league! This review applies the same ‘centurion’ concept not to individual authors, but to their *Urban Morphology* publications.

The journal has produced 13 citation centurion papers from the 120 published for which information is available and excluding contributions such as review articles, using citations recorded by Google Scholar as it records a wider range of sources than other citation records such as Scopus (Figure 6, Table 3). The analysis was completed in March-May 2022. Of those, eight scrape above the threshold (100-149 citations) and one has over 600. Nevertheless, for ten per cent of main papers to have such high citations, albeit some gathered over the quarter-century of the journal’s existence, seems a worthwhile achievement. The highest proportion of papers (27 per cent) received between 1 and 9 citations although the proportion receiving 20-49 citations was only marginally lower (26 per cent). Some papers, especially in recent issues, have yet to be cited; and self-citations have not been excluded in this count.

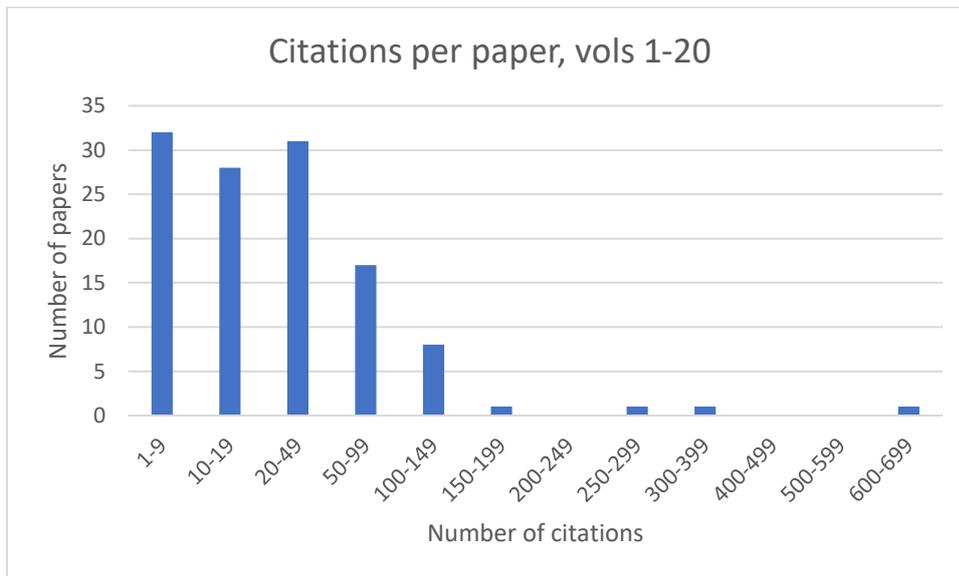


Figure 6. Citations per main paper (restricted to volumes 1–20 owing to limited citation of more recent papers).

Table 3. Citation centurion papers.

| Author | Year | Title | Citations (Google Scholar) |
|-----------|------|--|----------------------------|
| Moudon | 1997 | Urban morphology as an emerging interdisciplinary field' | 697 |
| Whitehand | 2001 | British urban morphology: the Conzenian tradition | 362 |
| Kropf | 2009 | Aspects of urban form | 271 |
| Levy | 1999 | Urban morphology and the problem of the modern urban fabric: some questions for research | 178 |

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|------|---|-----|
| Conzen | 2001 | The study of urban form in the United States | 139 |
| Cataldi, Maffei and Vaccaro | 2002 | Saverio Muratori and the Italian school of planning typology | 134 |
| Ye and van Nes | 2014 | Qualitative tools in urban morphology: combining space syntax, spacematrix and mixed-use index in a GIS framework | 130 |
| Gauthier and Gilliland | 2006 | Mapping urban morphology: a classification scheme for interpreting contributions to the study of urban form | 117 |
| Conzen | 2009 | How cities internalize their former urban fringes: a cross-cultural comparison | 116 |
| Gil, Beirao, Montenegro and Duarte | 2012 | On the discovery of urban typologies: data mining the many dimensions of urban form | 111 |
| Larkham | 2006 | The study of urban form in the UK | 110 |
| Marzot | 2002 | The study of urban form in Italy | 106 |
| Whitehand | 2009 | The structure of urban landscapes: strengthening research and practice | 105 |

The highest-cited paper, by a substantial margin, is Anne Vernez Moudon’s exploration of the field of urban morphology: the first paper in the first issue of the journal (Moudon, 1997). At the time of this analysis it had received 697 citations and was still being cited regularly (at least until the start of the COVID crisis: Figure 7) despite the age of the paper and that some of its comments have been overtaken by subsequent events. The paper has influenced 73 books, 95 PhD theses and 67 lower degree dissertations. The reach of the paper in academic journals is worthy of recording, and Table 4 demonstrates the variety of citing journals, with their disciplines and languages indicative of the breadth of linkages to the field of urban morphology. Some of the recent visibility and citations may result from this paper’s reprinting in a major book of readings in conservation (Cody and Siravo, 2019).

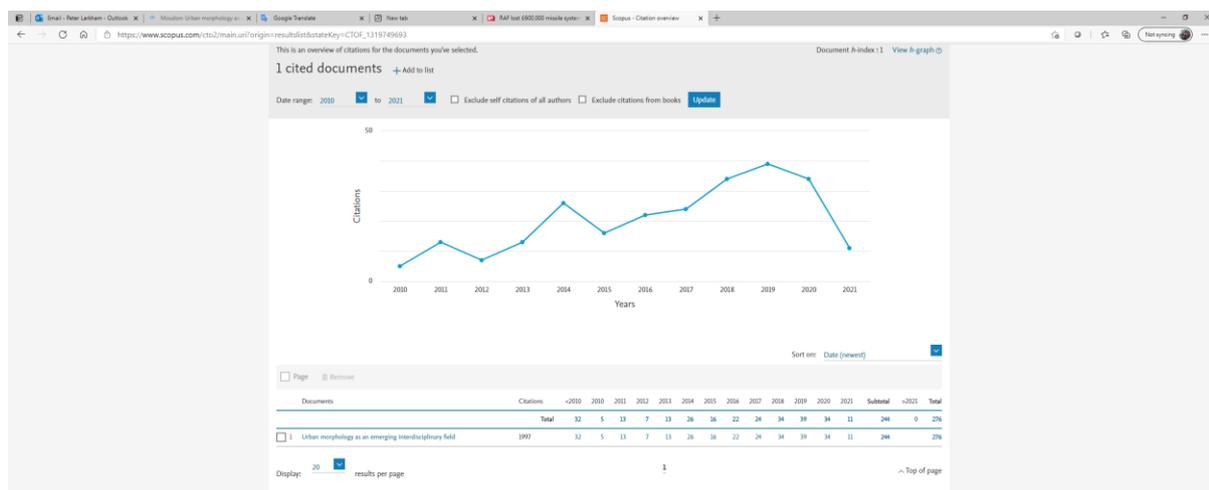


Figure 7. Citation frequency of Moudon (1997) (using Scopus data counting only 276 citations).

Table 4. Journal citations of Moudon (1997) (numbers in brackets indicate citations within the specified journal).

Urban Morphology (12)

ACM Transactions on Interactive Intelligent Systems (2); Acoustics Australia; Acta Scientiarum, Technology; Acta Universitatis Lodziensis; Anais do Museu Paulista: História e Cultura Material (2); Ancient Sindh Annual Research Jnl (2); Anales de Geografía de La Universidad Complutense (2); Annales de la recherche urbaine; Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis Studia Geographica; Applied Acoustics; Applied Geography; Archaeology; A+ BE / Architecture and the Built Environment (5); Architectus; ArchNet-IJAR: Int Jnl of Architectural Research; Armanshahr Architecture & Urban Development; Asian Journal of Engineering and Technology; Asian Jnl of Reseach in Social Sciences & Humanities; A/Z Itu Jnl of the Faculty of Architecture; Balikesir Üniversitesi Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü Dergisi (3); Belgeo. Revue belge de géographie; Biblio3W, Revista Bibliográfica de Geografía y Ciencias Sociales (2); Boletín de la Asociación de Geógrafos Españoles; Brazilian Geographical Jnl (2); Budownictwo i Architektura; Building & Environment (2); Building Simulation; Built Environment (6); Canadian Jnl of the Built Environment; Cities (5); Cityscape; Computing Environmental & Urban Systems (3); Contour Journal (2); Current Urban Studies (3); Cybergeo: European Journal of Geography (2); Czasopismo Techniczne; Designia; DIMENSI: Jnl of Architecture and Built Environment; Earth Resources and Environmental Remote Sensing/GIS Applications; Ecological Design for an Effective Urban Regeneration; Ecological Indicators; Environment & Planning B (9); Environment & Planning D; Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology (4); Environmental Innovation & Societal Transitions; Environmental Monitoring & Assessment; Építés-Építészettudomány (3); Espaces et Societes (2); Europa Regional; Exploring Urban; Footprint; Frontiers of Architectural Research; Geofocus: revista internacional de ciencia y tecnología de la informacion geográfica (2); Geografski Vestnik; Geoinfó: Revista do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Geografia (2); Golden Research Thoughts; Heritage & Society; Housing Studies; Human Geography; ICONARP Idealkent (3); Indonesian Jnl of Urban & Environmental Technology (2); In-Tech; Int Jnl Architectural Computing; Int Jnl Architectural Engineering & Urban Planning; Int Jnl Architectural Research; Int Jnl Architecture & Planning; International Jnl Design & Nature and Ecodynamics; Int Jnl Design Sciences & Technology (2); Int Jnl Disaster Resilience in the Built Environment; Int Jnl Environmental Research & Public Health; Int Jnl Environmental Studies; Int Jnl GI Science; Int Jnl Information Management; Int Jnl Nanotechnology and Molecular Computation; Int Jnl Urban Management & Energy Sustainability; Int Jnl Urban Sustainable Development; ISPRS Int Jnl Geo-Information (3); Int Planning Studies; Jnl American Planning Association; Jnl American Science; Jnl Applied Environmental & Biological Science; Jnl Applied Remote Sensing; Jnl Architectural & Planning Research (2); Jnl Architectural Research & Education (2); Jnl China Tourism Research; Jnl Chinese Architecture & Urbanism; Jnl Engineering; Jnl Epidemiological & Community Health; Jnl Heritage Tourism; Jnl Housing & the Built Environment (2); Jnl Landscape Architecture; Jnl Multidisciplinary Research; Jnl Open Source Software; Jnl Planning Education & Research (4); Jnl Space Syntax; Jnl Transport & Land Use (3); Jnl Urban Design (10); Jnl Urban & Extraurban Studies; Jnl Urbanism (2); Jnl Urban Regeneration & Renewal; Jurnal Arsitektur Arcade; Jurnal Penataan Ruang; Jurnal Perspektif Arsitektur; Jurnal Riset Pembangunan; Kart og Plan; Land (2); Landscape & Urban Planning (3); Land Use Policy; Management of Environmental Quality (3); Mediterranean JNL Social Science (2); Megaron; METU Jnl of the Faculty of Architecture (2); Middle States Geographer; Mokslas-Lietuvos ateitis; NAJUA: Architecture, Design and Built Environment; Nexus Network Jnl (2); Nordic Jnl Planning Research; Öneri Dergisi, Jnl of Marmara University Social Sciences Institute; Open House International; Pawon, Jurnal Arsitektur; Planlama; Planning Perspectives; Planning Malaysia (3); Planning Practice & Research (2); Procedia Environmental Science; Raega-O Espaço Geográfico em Análise (4); Remote Sensing; Remote Sensing of Environment; Remote Sensing for Environmental Monitoring, GIS Applications, and Geology; Revista de Ciências Gerenciais; Revista Espacios; Revista de Geografía Norte Grande (2); Revista de Geografía e Ordenamento do Território (2); Revista de Morfologia urbana (4); Revista Roumanian Geography; Revue Internationale de Géomatique; Revista do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Arquitetura e Urbanismo da FAUUSP (2); Revue Internationale de Geomatique; SAGE Open; Scientific Research & Essays; Spatium; Sosyal Çalışma Dergisi; Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi; Sustainable Cities & Society (2); Sustainability (9); Topos; Tourism Management Perspectives; Town & Country Planning (2); Traditional Dwellings & Settlements Review (2); Transactions in GIS; UPLand Open; Urban Climate (2); Urban Design Int (9); Urban Ecosystems (3); Urban Geography (3); Urban History Review (2); Urban Life; Urban Planning; Urban Planning Knowledge; Urban Science (2); Urban Remote Sensing; Urban Sustainability Transitions; urbe. Revista Brasileira de Gestão Urbana (2); Veridian E-Journal Silpakorn University; Water History.

Three of the other citation centurions are in the journal's 'study of urban form' series, and a fourth is a paper closely related to that series (Table 1). This clearly demonstrates that 'overview' papers generate much more interest than any of the morphological research papers, amongst which 30 or more citations is very respectable. The small-scale nature of the field and, perhaps, its local specificity, mentioned in Whitehand's first Editorial (1997), remain significant factors.

Two papers on morphology and philosophy are highly cited: Levy (1999: 179 citations) and Mugavin (1999: 49 citations). There seems to be no particular pattern to the citations in terms of the nature or language of journals: Levy is cited by 36 PhD theses. Despite the visibility and impact of these papers, and M. R. G. Conzen's own exhortation to develop as sounder philosophical basis for urban morphology in his last published contribution (Conzen, 1998), philosophical considerations have faded from the journal.

Another measure of citation-related impact is the Scopus Citescore, and there is an interesting comparison between *Urban Morphology* and related journals (Table 5). Although a smaller journal than the others compared, thus publishing fewer citable documents, we seem to be effective at spreading our message, comparing the ratio of documents to the calculated citescore. However our score is marginally lower than that using 2016-19 data (Larkham, 2020), while other journals have risen.

Table 5. Citescore data 2018-21

| Journal | Number of documents | Number of citations (Scopus) | Citescore |
|---|---------------------|------------------------------|-----------|
| <i>Urban Morphology</i> | 34 | 56 | 1.6 |
| <i>Planning Practice & Research</i> | 130 | 276 | 2.1 |
| <i>Journal of Urban Design</i> | 169 | 671 | 4.0 |
| <i>Urban Design International</i> | 84 | 250 | 3.0 |
| <i>Planning Perspectives</i> | 191 | 47 | 1.2 |

Using the 2021 Scimago journal database, which categorizes *Urban Morphology* as a social science journal, gives us a second quartile (Q2) standing, a H-index of 26, and shows 40 citations in the previous three years. Unfortunately this is a decline from a Q1 ranking in 2020. The H-index is defined as the maximum value of h such that the given author/journal has published at least h papers that have each been cited at least h times (see Hirsch, 2005) and, despite its limitations, it is interesting to note that the highest-ranked journal in this sector (*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*) has a H-index of 392, some Q1 journals have H-indexes lower than our 26, and a Q3 journal (*International Review of the Red Cross*) has a H-index of 39 (Scimago, 2022). The originator of the h-index suggested that, after 20 years of research, a h-index of 20 is good, 40 is outstanding and 60 is exceptional (Hirsch, 2005). *Urban Morphology* is certainly in the 'good' category.

Key issues

'Anglophone squint'

This is a problem recognised by Whitehand in both geography and urban morphology (Whitehand, 2005a, 2005b). It is the tendency of self-described ‘international’ journals to publish in English, and thus – by design or accident – channel the thinking or expression of those for whom English is not their first language. ‘It is not difficult to see ... how non-anglophone authors might feel under pressure to adopt anglophone norms if they wish to publish in an international journal or, alternatively, might decide to publish largely in the literature in their own language and suffer the limited circulation of their work that would be a likely consequence’ (Whitehand, 2005b, 3). Although the journal publishes in English, even on a crude examination of authorship the great majority of authors (71 per cent) do not have English as their first language (Table 6). For an international journal this is a significant achievement. While English is the largest single language category (29 per cent), to some extent this reflects the number of contributions by a small number of authors (including Conzen, Kropf, Larkham and Whitehand). Oliveira and Ünlü are redressing the balance for Portuguese and Turkish, while the number of Chinese contributors is rapidly increasing. Of the 23 authors of main papers in the last two issues, only three have English as their first language. The anglophone dominance is decreasing. However, the cultural dominance of anglophone ways of thought and expression embedded in publishable-quality ‘academic English’ remain a cause for concern. The lack of direct translations or cultural equivalents of ‘urban morphology’, separating the ‘study of’ from the urban form being studied, is an example (see Abaee, 2022, note 1).

Table 6. First language of contributors of main papers

| Language | Number of contributions |
|------------|-------------------------|
| English | 78 |
| Portuguese | 29 |
| Chinese | 28 |
| Italian | 24 |
| French | 21 |
| Turkish | 11 |
| Swedish | 9 |
| German | 9 |
| Polish | 7 |
| Japanese | 6 |
| Dutch | 6 |
| Arabic | 6 |
| Spanish | 5 |
| Croatian | 5 |
| Finnish | 4 |
| Ecuadorian | 3 |
| Serbian | 3 |
| Norwegian | 1 |
| Korean | 1 |
| Moroccan | 1 |
| Unknown | 15 |

Samuels (2012, 2015) has called attention to a ‘myopia’ in some US literature, which appears to have a North American bias despite purporting to be international in scope. In the examples he cites, the myopia is the exclusion of urban morphology (as understood and practised by ISUF) in major volumes on urban design and new urbanism and the lack of coverage of urban morphology, particularly in terms of authors associated with ISUF, in higher education curricula. In terms of the latter, another transatlantic myopia, certainly in the early 2000s, was the dominance of the urban models derived from the Chicago school of urban sociology in urban morphology curricula (Larkham, 2003).

The ongoing efforts to make *Urban Morphology* a genuinely international, although anglophone, journal should reduce such myopias; and the regional and cultural diversity of authors and editorial board members are evidence that, to some extent, this is successful. Other myopias do exist, though, in the under-representation of schools of thought related to urban form outside ISUF’s normal ‘comfort zone’ represented by the various national schools of thought identified by Moudon (1997). This is not through lack of editorial effort including, for example, the presence on the editorial board of space syntax researchers: but it is difficult to draw authors from other traditions out of their own publishing habits and comfort zones.

The problem of understanding different research traditions

This is a problem faced by ISUF since its inception. The different disciplines and national research traditions – perhaps also intellectual cultures – led to considerable problems in translation and understanding. This, in part, led to the series ‘the study of urban form in ...’. Other ISUF initiatives have led to the translation of key publications into other languages, including the translation of M. R. G. Conzen’s monograph on Alnwick into Chinese (Song *et al.*, 2011), Italian (Cataldi *et al.*, 2013) and Portuguese (Oliveira and Monteiro, 2022).

Several papers in this journal have sought to identify and bridge some of these gaps. Notable amongst these are Allahmoradi and Cömert (2021) and X. Li and Zhang (2021) integrating historico-geographical and configurational approaches, Y. Li and Gauthier (2014) exploring (urban) morphological and (architectural) typological issues, and Ye and van Nes (2014: a citation centurion paper) combining space syntax, spacematrix and mixed-use index in a GIS framework. Much more remains to be done to compare and contrast approaches, to apply ideas developed in one context to other geographical and cultural areas, and to develop new blended approaches: but we must be aware of the potential problems of mistranslation, misunderstanding and misapplication (see, for example, Cataldi, 2013; Slater, 2014).

The problem of interdisciplinarity

Interdisciplinarity has increased in many research fields especially in the past couple of decades, sometimes deliberately promoted by the allocation policies and priorities of funding bodies (the UK’s Research Excellence Framework being an example). The argument is that this allows complex problems to be addressed that cannot be dealt with from a single disciplinary perspective alone and the research results are more innovative and have higher impact (again, both are factors in recent research assessments: see Research England, 2019). Whether the collaborating disciplines are distant (for example the natural and social sciences; perhaps even quantitative and qualitative) or close (Morillo *et al.*, 2003) could be an interesting consideration. However the benefits of interdisciplinary research have been questionable, perhaps because the concept is ambiguous, owing to the range of perspectives and of potential results (Huutoniemi *et al.*, 2010).

Looking at the institutional affiliations of authors of papers in *Urban Morphology*, interdisciplinarity seems relatively limited and close (for example between built environment disciplines and geography or history). It is also clearly allied to the recent rise in multiple authorship of papers, although the multiple authorships in vol. 26(1) (papers with seven, four and three authors) represented relatively little – or quite close – interdisciplinarity. Clearly, wider collaborations could be explored although the rationales for collaborations need to be clear from the outset. Perhaps we should be seeking to transgress disciplinary boundaries, rendering them more permeable, synthesising disciplinary knowledge in new ways rather than simply ‘bolting on’ new perspectives (see Friman, 2010, p. 6).

The problem of linking with professional practice

From its earliest origins ISUF wanted to forge a closer link between academic research and relevant professional practice. *Urban Morphology* was to be the major conduit for academic publication, and other initiatives, some of which are still under development, would make the practice links.

Yet academic work on contemporary practice has been very limited, demonstrated by the low output recorded in Table 1 for studies of contemporary and future urban forms. Some work relating to architecture, planning and urban design has been published, but little that has been submitted has made sufficiently strong links to urban form and its characteristics.

This is, I think, a shortcoming for both the journal and ISUF. Engaging more closely with professional practice could broaden the remit and membership/readership, and perhaps increase the relevance and impact of publications in ways other than simple citations. The dialogue is developing (O’Connell, 2013) although only slowly.

The future?

Academic publishing is a fast-changing field. Priorities for this journal must remain the maintenance of its quality, its service to readers and authors, and its clear identity and specialist focus.

A key near-future challenge is the move to open-access publication, pushed by some government research funding agencies as a condition of grant awards. Although papers from such grants do come with an open-access payment, this does change the funding model of the journal from one based on member subscriptions. Many papers we publish are not derived, at least directly, from such governmental grants. We literally cannot afford, at present, to upset the ecosystem of the journal.

It seems desirable to seek to widen the scope of papers considered acceptable to the journal, to reflect the growing move to interdisciplinary work, the rise of new research approaches – particularly computational – and work that relates issues of urban form to a wide range of other concerns including sustainability, climate change, economic and social aspects. Some such work is being submitted already, but very little has been of publishable quality (most has been very descriptive) and even less has made clear links to urban form.

Urban Morphology has always existed on a knife edge, balancing the finance available from ISUF membership and activities, and the flow of papers of appropriate relevance and quality. It is indirectly subsidised by the time and effort of those involved in its production, their families and (perhaps unknowingly) their academic institutions. This cannot continue indefinitely. It is highly likely that, within the next few years, there will be further automation in production processes, especially in the paper submission and review element; and potentially a move to online, perhaps even online-only publication (some

subscribing academic libraries already do not accept the paper copies). The continued approaches from major journal publishers offer a way forward from the financial and production problems, but the character of the journal would inevitably change (as can be seen with *Planning Practice and Research*). This might be the eventual decision, especially if a supportive relationship can be developed with a publisher (such as that between the International Planning History Society, the publisher Taylor & Francis, and the journal *Planning Perspectives*). But at present, while ISUF remains a small but thriving organization, its small but thriving and high-quality journal seems likely to continue.

Note

1. This is a personal evaluation, although based on a wide range of data; and readers should note that the author has been involved with this journal as Associate Editor and Editor since its inception.

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