

The 11th International Planning History Society Conference: Towards a new era

Barcelona, 14-17 July 2004

The birth of the *Perspectivas Urbanas/ Urban Perspectives* journal was loosely associated with the preparations for the 11th Conference of the IPHS, and shares the same principal objective i.e. to improve the bridges between a consolidated international scientific network functioning in English, and a more linguistically fragmented Latin world, somewhat outside from the scientific debate taking place therein. It is not possible that the Conference, which took place from 14-17 July in the *Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona*, be the object of a distant review here but nevertheless it is fitting to make an assessment and set out the new era for the journal.

In addition to being the first conference host city of a Latin country, Barcelona offered a number of themes for reflection. The celebration of the Forum 2004, of “the cultures”, that prolonged an urban regeneration strategy, in the same line as that initiated with the motive of the 1992 Olympic Games and the international debate over the so-called “Barcelona model”, were seen as a good opportunity to set the general conference theme - “*Planning models and the culture of cities*”. This sought to give rise to a collective reflection concerning the nature of the forms or methods of planning intervention, placing it in relation to the cultural dimension of urbanism. Although it left room for very different approaches, it pointed towards the international debate concerning the role of culture and the “cultural activities” in past and recent planning strategies. The different sessions fell under the following sub-themes: “*Cultural Planning: images, heritage, events and cultural strategies*”; “*Transfer of Models and the Culture of Cities*”; “*Planning Cultures: from theories and historiography to the Planning of urban spaces and landscapes*”; and “*Urban processes and urbanism*”. The organisation of the sub-themes and sessions sought to establish areas for dialogue. With the objective of speeding up the presentations and reserving sufficient time for discussion, the papers and the organisation of the sessions had been published previously through the

Conference web-site. The abundance and high quality of the papers was complemented with the plenary session papers, which tackled different aspects of a wide range of problems, from those more interested in the socio-economic dimension of urban policies linked to the processes of globalisation (M. Cohen), to a panoramic critique of experiences in Latin America (R. Segre), the reflection upon the urbanism of Barcelona (O. Bohigas), the trajectories and convergence between the Anglo-Saxon and Latin urbanistic traditions (M. Hebbert), up to the different types of suburban landscapes of the United States (D. Hayden). The whole content of the Conference is set out in the *Conference Book*, which incorporates the summaries and plenary session papers, and a *CDRom* with the full papers, as well as on the Conference web-site (www.iphs2004.com).

The sequence of conferences of the IPHS shows a fast and progressive internationalisation, and high levels of participation sustained in the different events. The 11th Conference maintained this tendency, and in our mind made a number of significant contributions. These included the appreciable increase in attendance and communications, with more than 300 delegates, 225 accepted communications and some six roundtable sessions. It is also worth mentioning the considerable participation from Latin countries, which was one of the prime objectives of this Conference. North-western Europe, English-speaking America and the Pacific Basin have been the geographical areas which habitually have been the most well represented at previous Conferences. From the 72 countries represented at the 2004 Conference, the strong participation from these areas was maintained, but the weight from the Latin countries increased the overall figures and considerably modified the proportions. Delegates from Latin America (21.7%) and Latin Europe (22.4%) reached 44% of the overall total. If the language used in the communications and the sessions is taken as an indicator, these proportions are more moderate, but still significant: 65% in English

and 35% in Spanish or Portuguese. Another aspect which stands out with regard to the previous Conferences, was the introduction of a systematic process of evaluation of the communications, in order to guarantee the coherence of the content and higher standards.

The governing committee of the *IPHS* had clearly manifested its desire to step away from the notion of being a “British club”. The 11th Conference has marked a relevant inflexion in this aspect. The next Conference, to take place in New Delhi in 2006, will without doubt be another opportunity for the Society to open its doors to other urban worlds. These steps are seen as important, but the roads that lie ahead are long. Representation from a number of key cultural areas at the Barcelona Conference was clearly missing, or at least was very weak, as was the case with Eastern Europe (3 delegates), the Middle East (7 delegates) and Africa (5 delegates). On the other hand, care needs to be taken to ensure that there is consolidation and continuity with the widening of the horizons that were achieved in Barcelona. One possibility might be an Iberian-Latin American section of the *IPHS* or a similar mechanism, capable of “Latinising” a very marked Anglo-Saxon collective and, at the same time, facilitating its influence over researchers in the Latin world. One profitable influence might be to stimulate the emphasis in comparative studies of an international nature and in cross-disciplinary visions, contributing to greater possibilities of understanding the complex nature of urbanistic interventions and of urban processes.

Perspectivas Urbanas/ Urban Perspectives is proposing this task of consolidation in this new era. The preparation of the Conference provided the initial impulse. The Conference itself provided the occasion for bringing together the editorial board and establishing the criteria for its continuity. Amongst the different questions discussed, it is appropriate to highlight the two basic propositions for this new era. In the first place, establishing clear criteria of quality through an evaluation process, drawing upon any

mous reports, following the standards of the international academic community.

In the second place, guaranteeing the diffusion and presence in libraries and departments of the printed version of the journal, to complement the open digital version. In accordance with this criteria, the first four issues of the journal were distributed to all delegates with the other material of the Conference pack. In the future, it is a question of stimulating and widening the exchange of the issues, avoiding the high costs involved of a strictly commercial distribution. In contrast to “*Planning History*”, which is edited within the framework of the *IPHS*, the specificity of the journal will be to direct it principally towards the Latin world. This objective will allow for utilising the different Romance languages under current usage whose proximity facilitates mutual understanding, as well as English, the *lingua franca* of international scientific exchange. It is proposed as a platform for the open dialogue between architects, urbanists and planners, geographers and other urban scholars, which is common practice at the heart of the *IPHS*, but is less frequent in our cultural area. An inevitable eclecticism that should not be seen in a negative way, but rather as a confirmation of the diversity of approaches, and also of methodology and sources, that now coexist in urban studies.

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