

Preface

Interdisciplinarity and Cross-Sectoral Collaboration in Urban Research, Planning and Design

Ilaria Geddes, Nadia Charalambous¹

Contemporary cities stand at the crossroads of unprecedented challenges and opportunities. Rapid climate change, environmental degradation, mobility inefficiencies, resource inequities, and rising social inequalities pose complex and urgent problems for urban centres worldwide. Yet, within this complexity lies the potential for innovation, collective action, and sustainable transformation. Urban research, planning, and design are uniquely positioned to address these challenges, offering solutions that mitigate environmental burdens, promote social equity, and enhance the quality of life for urban residents.

The joint KAEBUP – 3rd CyNUM Regional Conference, hosted by the University of Cyprus from 6th to 8th December 2023, acted as an opportunity to bring together academics and practitioners from both the private and public sectors to exchange knowledge and explore ways for strengthening collaboration to tackle urban challenges collectively. This cooperative effort was reflected in the shared organization of the conference mobilizing the international research project Knowledge Alliance for Evidence-Based Urban Practices (KAEBUP) and the local scientific group Cyprus Network of Urban Morphology (CyNUM). The interaction between the two meant that the conference offered a breadth of perspectives, building upon the strong theoretical foundations of urban morphology to explore how scientific evidence can be integrated into education that is relevant for the profession and in successful practices which must deliver sustainable urban environments.

The conference featured twelve keynote speakers, who delivered plenary lectures or acted as discussants in round tables, and whom we deeply thank for their participation: Ed Parham (Space Syntax Limited), Mark David Major (Abu Dhabi University), Oya Atalay Franck (European Association of Architectural Education), Ruth Schagemann (Architects Council of Europe), Giuseppe Strappa (ISUF Italy), Achilleas Kalopedis (ALA Planning Partnership), Howayda Al-Harithy (American University of Beirut), Lora Nicolaou (Frederick University), Marco Maretto (University of Parma), Laurent Antonczak (RMIT Vietnam), Vitor Oliveira (University of Porto), and Wafa Al-Ghatam (University of Bahrain).

The sessions were grouped into seven thematic areas:

1. Theory and concepts of evidence-based design: the history of Evidence-Based Design (EBD) and how it has been adapted to urban design and planning; conceptual models of EBD; issues in the interpretation and the translation of research findings for practice.
2. Emerging research methodologies for application in urban planning and design: recent tools and methods created within academia or practice for application in design and planning processes.

1. Society and Urban Form (SURF) Research Lab, Department of Architecture, University of Cyprus.

3. The role of urban morphology in evidence-based design and planning: 'traditional' morphological approaches (historico-geographical, process-typology, space syntax) and their role in Evidence-Based Design and Planning (EBDP); evaluations and discussions of their uptake, effectiveness, and success in professional practice.
4. Evidence-based design and planning in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East (EMME) region: the extent of the application of EBDP in different design and planning contexts in the region; progress in engaging industry and public sector agencies in the uptake of EBDP in the region.
5. Case studies of research methods applied in professional practice: examples of specific applications of research methods and tools used in real projects to produce design and planning outputs; successful examples as well as challenging projects to reflect on; case studies from any geographical areas and the EMME region, in particular.
6. The evidence from participation in design: the role of the public, NGOs and civil society in planning and design, creating knowledge from participation for the purposes of sustainable and inclusive planning and design, the value of different types of knowledge (from experience, practice, know-how, etc.) in EBD.
7. In memory of Professor Robert Saliba: The urban form of Beirut: the historic formation and transformation of Beirut; tradition and modernity in the urban form and architecture of Beirut; city-planning for post-war reconstruction, and contemporary urban design in Beirut and the Arab World.

The proceedings of this conference reflect the shared ambition of academics and practitioners to strengthen cooperation to tackle pressing urban issues. Evidence-Based Design and Planning (EBDP) served as the central focus of this collaboration, providing rigorous analytical frameworks that complement traditional intuition-led design processes. By integrating robust data gathering, advanced methodologies, and interdisciplinary perspectives, EBDP equips urban professionals with the tools necessary to evaluate and implement effective, sustainable solutions for the built environment.

This conference emerged from a recognition that, despite the growing need for evidence-based practices, significant challenges persist to the flow of knowledge between academic research and professional practice, and vice versa. While higher education institutions across Europe and beyond are increasingly incorporating EBDP into their curricula, there remain barriers and challenges to its integration into daily professional work. Similarly, while a few pioneering firms have successfully embedded evidence-based methods into their operations, stronger links between academia, businesses, and public agencies are essential to scale these successes.

The themes explored in this conference span the theoretical foundations of EBDP, emerging methodologies, and practical applications across diverse urban contexts, with a particular focus on the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East (EMME) region, including contributions to these proceedings from Cyprus, Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, Egypt and Iran. From historical urban morphology, the integration of new technologies and urban regeneration strategies, to participatory design processes that amplify the voices of civil society, and critical insights into planning practice, these proceedings illustrate the potential of EBDP to create innovative, inclusive, and sustainable urban environments.

By bringing together academics and practitioners from around the world, the conference fostered a platform for mutual learning and collaboration. It emphasized the value of blending research-driven insights with practical expertise and know-how to address shared challenges such as urban densification, mobility, climate resilience, and heritage preservation. The case studies, conceptual explorations, and methodological advancements presented

here demonstrate how EBDP can bridge the gap between theory and practice, transforming abstract knowledge into actionable strategies.

Together, the papers in this collection, exemplify the dynamic relationship between research and practice in urban planning and design. The contributors address both theoretical frameworks and practical methodologies, advancing evidence-based approaches to urban challenges. The range of topics – from space syntax theory to the historical and morphological study of urban settlements and participatory design – demonstrates the breadth of issues and contexts in which urban planning and design intersect with research. The topics addressed reflect contemporary challenges and advancements in urban theory and practice, with a particular focus on the integration of new technologies, historical context, and urban regeneration strategies, examining the role of urban form and policy in shaping public space, human experiences, and the socio-cultural fabric of cities.

Each paper demonstrates a commitment to evidence-based approaches that rely on rigorous data collection, analysis, and interdisciplinary collaboration: their strong theoretical foundations combined with practical methodologies and sensitive contextualisation underscore the importance of critical thinking and interdisciplinarity in addressing contemporary urban challenges, from sustainability and resilience to social equity and historical preservation.

In sum, the papers in these proceedings contribute to the ongoing dialogue between academia and practice, emphasizing the importance of evidence-based methodologies, interdisciplinary collaboration, and the integration of historical and contextual knowledge in urban planning. The insights and frameworks presented here are valuable for addressing the pressing urban challenges of today and for fostering more sustainable, resilient, and inclusive urban environments in the future.

As editors of these proceedings, we extend our gratitude to the contributors for their diverse perspectives, to the organizing committee and Easy Conferences for their dedication to delivering a successful conference and to the scientific committee for devoting their time to the review process. We hope this volume inspires continued collaboration and innovation, driving forward the pursuit of urban environments that are resilient, equitable, and human-centered.

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Nadia Charalambous, KAEBUP Project Coordinator; Associate Professor, University of Cyprus

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