

MAIN SECTION

(Re-)generating Symbolic Port-City Links: Urban Regeneration and the Cultural Demaritimisation and Remaritimisation of European Port Cities

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ABSTRACT

Urban policies in many European port cities have displayed attempts to diversify the local economy and rebrand the city within interurban competition. Whilst these processes have been commented upon in relation to their socio-economic and spatial outcomes, little research has engaged with their connection with the maritime nature and exceptionalism of port cities. With examples from urban development and regeneration strategies in two European port cities, Rotterdam (The Netherlands) and Valencia (Spain), this paper elaborates on the concepts of demaritimisation and remaritimisation of port cities from a cultural perspective, to support the argument that, in some cases, these strategies have been underpinned by attempts to overlook, restore or depart from the city's maritime identity, history and heritage. These efforts by policy makers aim to overcome the perceived 'disadvantage' of the port city image or to create and promote different, not necessarily authentic, relationships with the port and the sea to brand the city.

KEYWORDS

Demaritimisation; European Port Cities; Port-City Relationships; Remaritimisation; Urban Regeneration

PEER REVIEWED

<https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2612-0496/12089>

ISSN 2612-0496

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Introduction

For centuries, the ‘myth’ of the port city has been fuelled by the open yet rebellious attitude and cosmopolitan character associated with these cities, by their alleged exceptionalism¹ and extraterritoriality. Late industrialisation and the development of modern ports, deindustrialisation, technological advancements and changing patterns of maritime trade worldwide led to the restructuring of most European ports and, in particular, to the migration of ports outside their traditional central city locations.² Since the 1980s, in many port cities, alternative local development policies (such as culture-led urban regeneration) have attempted to compensate for the loss of traditional maritime economic activities and jobs and to alleviate the negative socio-economic impacts of port restructuring through waterfront redevelopment.³

This paper explores urban development and regeneration strategies in European port cities and their connection—or lack thereof—with the maritime specificity of these cities and their elusive exceptionalism. It builds on the concepts of demaritimisation and remaritimisation to develop a theoretical tool for the critical analysis of urban regeneration within the socio-spatial and symbolic relationships between ports and cities. Cultural demaritimisation and remaritimisation are defined and tested in relation to the experience of two European port cities, Rotterdam (The Netherlands) and Valencia (Spain). The key argument of the paper is that processes that could be described as cultural demaritimisation and remaritimisation have been visible in regeneration policies in many European port cities since the 1980s. These processes may be either the—sometimes unintended—outcome of urban development and branding strategies or a political choice aimed at ‘getting rid’ of, transforming or constructing, the city’s maritime image.

The analysis⁴ provides a comparative perspective on the two case-study cities. Fieldwork was undertaken in 2018 through a mixed-method approach encompassing the review of relevant policy documents (e.g. urban regeneration projects, spatial visions and strategic plans), approximately 10 interviews in each city involving local policy makers, port officials, city planners and experts, approximately 10 street surveys in

1 John Belchem, *Merseypride: Essays in Liverpool Exceptionalism* (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ Pr, 2000); Eric Van Hooydonk, *Soft Values of Seaports: A Strategy for the Restoration of Public Support for Seaports* (Antwerp: Garant, 2007); Alice Mah, *Port Cities and Global Legacies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137283146>.

2 Brian Hoyle, ‘Global and Local Change on the Port-City Waterfront,’ *Geographical Review* 90, no. 3 (July 2000): 395, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3250860>.

3 See for example Richard Marshall, *Waterfronts in Post-Industrial Cities* (London: Spon Press, 2001).

4 This research is part of a broader project on event-led regeneration and the socio-spatial, political and symbolic ties between ports and cities, undertaken by the author in 2016-2020 and funded by the University of Hull.

each locality with residents and visitors,⁵ non-participant observations in redeveloped public spaces.

In the following sections, firstly, the literature on the exceptionalism of port cities and urban regeneration is briefly explored. Secondly, the concepts of cultural demaritimisation and remaritimisation are defined. Thirdly, the relevant aspects of the experiences of Rotterdam and Valencia are presented. Fourthly, cultural demaritimisation is explored more in detail in the case of Rotterdam. Finally, the case of Valencia is discussed more in depth in relation to cultural remaritimisation.

Maritime exceptionalism and urban regeneration

European port cities are distinctive and fascinating for both positive and negative reasons.⁶ On the one hand, they have traditionally been objects of “worship, myth and legend”.⁷ They have been associated with freedom⁸ and portrayed as “cities on the edge,”⁹ radical, independent, rebellious and anti-authoritarian.¹⁰ On the other hand, port cities have been perceived as “havens of sin, poverty, crime, disease,”¹¹ where the lifestyle of their dwellers deserved moral condemnation.¹²

In the second half of the 20th century, negative narratives of port cities were fuelled by accounts of urban decay, deindustrialisation and unemployment, at a time in which scholars heralded the increasing separation between ports and cities.¹³ The presence of vast abandoned port areas in central city locations, together with the structural challenges associated with port restructuring, became the rationale for urban regeneration and waterfront redevelopment,¹⁴ where policy makers in declining European port cities have tried to diversify local economies and to re-launch their

5 Street surveys involved residents and visitors in redeveloped urban spaces on the waterfront. In relation to this paper, respondents were asked if they felt that regenerated waterfront environments in the city had retained their maritime distinctiveness and if their experience of these spaces had impacted on their interest in maritime history and modern ports.

6 Mah, *Port Cities and Global Legacies*, 29.

7 Van Hooydonk, *Soft Values of Seaports*, 57.

8 Waltraud Kokot, “Port Cities as Areas of Transition – Comparative Ethnographic Research,” in *Port Cities as Areas of Transition: Ethnographic Perspectives*, ed. Waltraud Kokot, Kathrin Wildner, Mijal Gandelsman-Trier and Astrid Wonneberger (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2008), 10.

9 As in the “Cities on the Edge” (COTE) project, see John Davies, *Cities on the Edge: Istanbul, Marseilles, Gdańsk, Bremen, Naples, Liverpool* (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ Pr, 2008).

10 Mah, *Port Cities and Global Legacies*, 177.

11 Van Hooydonk, *Soft Values of Seaports*, 23.

12 Han Meyer, *City and Port: Urban Planning as a Cultural Venture in London, Barcelona, New York, and Rotterdam: Changing Relations between Public Urban Space and Large-Scale Infrastructure* (Rotterdam: International Books, 1999), 32.

13 See for example Hoyle, “Change on the Port–City Waterfront,” 396–397; Glen Norcliffe, Keith Bassett, and Tony Hoare, “The Emergence of Postmodernism on the Urban Waterfront,” *Journal of Transport Geography* 4, no. 2 (June 1996): 123–34, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0966-6923\(96\)00005-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/0966-6923(96)00005-1).

14 Meyer, *City and Port*, 48.

cities “through the redevelopment of an area”.¹⁵ In some cases, cultural policies and events have been the catalyst for the regeneration of urban waterfronts, with the redevelopment of Barcelona’s Port Vell as a primary example.¹⁶

A few studies have engaged with the symbolic aspects of waterfront redevelopment and the regeneration of former port areas, in particular in relation to the maritime character of port cities. Scholars agree that elements of the port city’s maritime past are being commodified to create an artificial and saleable image of the port.¹⁷ In the 1990s, Norcliffe et al.¹⁸ interpreted this process as part of the reshaping of urban waterfronts in relation to the emerging postmodern consumerist culture, aimed at offering new “place experiences”. Many redeveloped waterfronts now tend to display a certain “sameness,”¹⁹ generating a “sense of déjà vu”.²⁰ Whether or not intentionally, city planners tend to be influenced by maritime-related stereotypes and myths.²¹ Atkinson²² discusses how the development of Victoria Dock Village in Hull made use of street furniture to provide the new residential neighbourhood with a maritime feeling, creating a “maritime-kitsch’ aesthetic” that was nonetheless appreciated by some of its residents. Yarker²³ develops the concept of tangential attachments to show how, taking NewcastleGateshead Quayside as an example, pre-regeneration memories of waterfronts may survive their transformation.

Defining cultural demaritimisation and remaritimisation

In the field of transport economics, the term demaritimisation is sometimes deployed to describe the loss of established maritime practices in port cities or a reduced relative economic importance of maritime

15 Rinio Bruttomesso, “Complexity on the Urban Waterfront,” in *Waterfronts in Post-Industrial Cities*, by Richard Marshall (London: Spon Press, 2001), 47.

16 For example, Franco Bianchini and Michael Parkinson, eds., *Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration: The West European Experience* (Manchester: Manchester Univ Pr, 1993); Jussi S. Jauhiainen, “Waterfront Redevelopment and Urban Policy: The Case of Barcelona, Cardiff and Genoa,” *European Planning Studies* 3, no. 1 (March 1995): 3–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654319508720287>; Beatriz García, “Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration in Western European Cities: Lessons from Experience, Prospects for the Future,” *Local Economy* 19, no. 4 (2004).

17 As mentioned by Maciej Kowalewski, “Images and Spaces of Port Cities in Transition,” *Space and Culture* 24, no. 1 (2018): 53–65, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331218783940>.

18 Norcliffe et al., “Postmodernism on Urban Waterfronts”, 132.

19 *ibid.*, 130.

20 Eric Van Hooydonk, “Port City Identity and Urban Planning,” *Portus* 18 (2009): 19.

21 Kokot, “Port Cities as Areas of Transition,” 10.

22 David Atkinson, “Kitsch Geographies and the Everyday Spaces of Social Memory,” *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 39, no. 3 (March 2007): 521–40, <https://doi.org/10.1068/a3866>.

23 Sophie Yarker, “Tangential Attachments: Towards a More Nuanced Understanding of the Impacts of Cultural Urban Regeneration on Local Identities,” *Urban Studies* 55, no. 15 (2018).

functions in favour of other economic activities.²⁴ Similarly, the term remaritimisation is sometimes used to describe the opposite process, where established maritime functions regain a greater relative importance within the local economy or new maritime practices are introduced. As suggested by Musso and Ghiara,²⁵ these concepts are not unambiguous and may also be interpreted from a cultural perspective.

Therefore, it is possible to elaborate on these concepts and apply them to the study of urban regeneration and the symbolic aspects of port-city relationships. 'Cultural demaritimisation' may be defined as the loss of aspects of local maritime cultures or heritage in favour of other narratives or elements of local identities. Local policy makers may, not necessarily intentionally, overlook aspects of local maritime culture, history and heritage (e.g. fishing or maritime trade) or may prioritise and value other aspects of the city's identity and local economy (e.g. manufacturing, cultural consumption) to the detriment of the city's maritime identity. Similarly, the term 'cultural remaritimisation' can be deployed to describe processes of urban transformation, cultural policy making or city branding aimed at creating or recreating socio-spatial and symbolic relationships with the port and the sea. In this case, urban policy may either try to reconnect with local maritime history, heritage and culture or override local values and meanings to create a new, possibly artificial connection with the sea.

Although the concepts of demaritimisation and remaritimisation are not widely used to analyse the cultural and symbolic aspects of port-city relationships or waterfront redevelopment, existing studies do propose similar ideas. Van Hooydonk argues that port migration contributed to weakening psychological port-city ties and transforming port cities into "dehumanising islands".²⁶ Andrade Marqués observes that waterfront redevelopment risks transforming many port cities into coastal cities, by eroding their maritime distinctiveness.²⁷ Dovey suggests that urban regeneration on the waterfront has pursued "a wholesale reconstruction of the urban image with spectacles of artistic, social and economic dynamism".²⁸

Cultural demaritimisation or remaritimisation are visible in a range of urban, economic and social regeneration projects and policies in

24 See for example Enrico Musso and Marco Bennacchio, "Demaritimisation o remaritimisation? L'evoluzione dello scenario economico delle città portuali," in *Porti, città e territorio costiero. Le dinamiche della sostenibilità*, ed. Stefano Soriani (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002); Enrico Musso, "Port Added Value at the Heart of the City Port Negotiations". *European Transports/Trasporti Europei* 23 (2003): 33; Claudio Ferrari et al., "Ports and Local Development: Evidence from Italy". *International Journal of Transport Economics/Rivista internazionale di economia dei trasporti* 37, no. 1 (2010): 10.

25 Enrico Musso and Hilda Ghiara, "The Economic Port Landscape. From Traffic to Remaritimisation". *Portus* 18 (2009): 63.

26 Van Hooydonk, *Soft Values of Seaports*, 42.

27 María José Andrade Marqués, "Puertos: Paisajes de memoria, lugares de oportunidad," *EDaP* 7 (2014): 33.

28 Kim Dovey, *Fluid City: Transforming Melbourne's Urban Waterfront*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 13.

European port cities, including local development plans, cultural policy or mega-event programming. These processes may also occur where maritime heritage is contested or is perceived as dissonant heritage.²⁹ In port cities where local maritime history and heritage are associated with negative collective memories (e.g. war, disasters, poverty) or with present structural socio-economic challenges (e.g. unemployment, deprivation, pollution), the port city image may contribute to fuelling territorial stigmatisation.³⁰ As a result, policy makers, planners and developers may attempt to overlook aspects of local maritime history and heritage that are deemed as problematic, contested or potentially detrimental within interurban competition, or may stress these aspects to legitimate urban transformation.

Urban regeneration at the (symbolic) port-city interface: the case of Rotterdam and Valencia

In Rotterdam and Valencia, policy makers have implemented urban regeneration and city branding policies, in particular in the 1990s and 2000s, to put their city on the global map of cultural tourism [TAB. 1].

In the 1990s, many would agree that Rotterdam displayed some of the typical challenges commonly associated with port migration and restructuring, such as a relatively young and low-skilled population, unemployment and the presence of derelict former port areas in proximity to the city centre. As part of the city's long-term policy to attract middle-income households, urban regeneration taking place since the 1980s has been redesigning the riverfront and promoting a stronger relationship between the city and the river. For example, the redevelopment of Kop van Zuid, which was initially envisioned in the 1980s with the aim of prioritising social housing, made use of high-rise modern architecture to shape the new image of Rotterdam as a port metropolis. Cultural and sporting events, such as UEFA EURO 2000 and the European Capital of Culture 2001, contributed to celebrating these redevelopments.³¹ The city's cultural event policy undertaken from the 1990s to the mid-2010s has fur

29 John E Tunbridge and Gregory John Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict* (Chichester: J. Wiley, 1997).

30 Enrico Tommarchi and Franco Bianchini, "A Heritage-Inspired Cultural Mega Event in a Stigmatised City: Hull UK City of Culture 2017," *European Planning Studies* (forthcoming).

31 Greg Richards and Julie Wilson, "The Impact of Cultural Events on City Image: Rotterdam, Cultural Capital of Europe 2001," *Urban Studies* 41, no. 10 (September 2004): 1931–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0042098042000256323>. Yawei Chen, "Urban Regeneration through Mega Event: The Case of Rotterdam," *Proceedings of 2012 Shanghai International Conference of Social Science*, 2012, 29–36.

	Rotterdam	Valencia
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 650,597 2.3 million (metropolitan region) (source: BRP – OBI, 2020; OECD, 2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 801,545 1.5 million (metropolitan region) (source: Ajuntament de València, 2020; 2017)
Unemployment rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7.3% (national average: 3.6%) (source: Gemeente Rotterdam/CBS, 2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12.5% (national average: 14.5%) (source: Ajuntament de València/INE, 2017)
Value added of the port	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18bn Euros (direct) 27.2bn Euros (total) (source: Erasmus Centre for Urban, Port and Transport Economics, 2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0.9bn Euros (direct) 2.5bn Euros (total) (source: APV, 2016/2019)
No. of jobs in the maritime cluster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 121,800 (direct) 225,100 (overall) (source: Erasmus Centre for Urban, Port and Transport Economics, 2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 16,400 (direct) 38,800 (overall) (source: APV, 2016/2019)
Overnight stays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.73 million +63% in 2012-2018 (Gemeente Rotterdam/CBS, 2012-2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.06 million +24% in 2012-2018 (Turismo Valencia, 2012-2018)

TAB. 1 Key facts and figures about the case-study cities. Table elaborated by the author on the basis of the following sources (as indicated in the table): BRP – OBI, 2020; OECD, 2017; Gemeente Rotterdam/CBS, 2018; Erasmus Centre for Urban, Port and Transport Economics, 2018; Gemeente Rotterdam/CBS, 2012-2018; Ajuntament de València, 2020; 2017; Ajuntament de València/INE, 2017; APV, 2016/2019; Turismo Valencia, 2012-2018.

ther contributed to increasing Rotterdam's attractiveness and to fuelling its touristification.³²

Due to its geographical settings, Valencia has long been considered as "giving its back to the sea".³³ The city was established on the River Túria, about five kilometres inland. A few maritime villages developed on the coast around the port and gradually became part of the city.³⁴ However, local policy makers have sought to establish a stronger relationship with the sea and to strengthen the city's maritime feeling. The Balcón al Mar

32 In the period 2012-2018, overnight stays in Rotterdam increased from 1.06 million to 1.73 million. Source: Gemeente Rotterdam, Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek. For a discussion of the touristification of port cities see María J. Andrade and João Pedro Costa, "Touristification of European Port-Cities: Impacts on Local Populations and Cultural Heritage," in *European Port Cities in Transition. Moving Towards More Sustainable Sea Transport Hubs*, eds. Angela Carpenter and Rodrigo Lozano (Cham: Springer, 2020).

33 Interview, expert3, 2018; interview, policy maker1, 2018.

34 David L. Prytherch and Josep Vicent Boira Maiques, "City Profile: Valencia," *Cities* 26, no. 2 (April 2009): 105, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2008.11.004>.

project, agreed with the Port Authority in 1997, consisted in the reconversion of the historic harbour into a mixed-use retail and leisure area. This was coupled with a seafront promenade in the Cabanyal and Malvarrosa districts. The project was revised in the early 2000s, when the America's Cup 2007 provided the opportunity to transform the harbour and to project Valencia as a global visitor destination. The local government in office since 1991 also pursued a controversial urban regeneration scheme focused on extending Avenida de Blasco Ibañez to the seafront, which would have implied the destruction of many heritage buildings in Cabanyal, one of the city's maritime districts, had it been fully implemented.³⁵

Port cities vs. ordinary cities: cultural demaritimisation as a policy mindset

In a context of interurban competition, the challenges associated with many port cities may be perceived as a sort of 'port city stigma' hindering urban attractiveness. As a result of this, policy makers may be inclined to overlook local maritime history and heritage with the aim of 'getting rid' of the port image.

Rotterdam is Europe's largest and busiest port.³⁶ However, the way in which the relationship among the city, the river and the port has been framed in urban regeneration and urban cultural policies since the 1990s should be problematised. Arguably, the redevelopment of Kop van Zuid focused more on exploiting the symbolic power of water as an asset for urban design and branding than on retaining aspects of the area's maritime identity. Proximity to water was spectacularised with the use of modern architecture and high-rise developments, evoking waterfront redevelopment in North American cities, to affirm Rotterdam's image as a modern global city.³⁷ The relationship between the city and water, rather than its port, was also a key component of cultural event programming, such as in the case of the *Stromende Stad* (Flowing City) subtheme of the European Capital of Culture 2001 programme or the 2003 Year of Water.

Despite the fact that this strategy did produce effects in terms of increased attractiveness in the medium term,³⁸ its broader impacts on symbolic

35 Luis del Romero Renau and Catherine Trudelle, "Mega Events and Urban Conflicts in Valencia, Spain: Contesting the New Urban Modernity," *Urban Studies Research* 2011 (July 14, 2011): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1155/2011/587523>.

36 In 2018, the Port of Rotterdam ranked 10th in the world (1st in Europe) in terms of freight throughput (469.0 million tons) and 11th in the world (again 1st in Europe) for container throughput (14.513 million TEUs), source: Port of Rotterdam (2019) <https://www.portofrotterdam.com/en/news-and-press-releases/port-of-rotterdam-throughput-amounted-to-4694-million-tonnes-in-2019>. Covering a surface of 12,600 hectares, the Port of Rotterdam is also the largest port infrastructure in Europe (source: Port of Rotterdam, n.d., <https://www.portofrotterdam.com/en/doing-business/why-rotterdam/the-port-that-will-take-you-ahead>).

37 Richards and Wilson, "The Impact of Cultural Events on City Image," 1938.

38 *ibid.*; Arie Romein, "Leisure in Waterfront Redevelopment: An Issue of Urban Planning in Rotterdam?" *2005 AESOP Conference*, Vienna, 13-17 July, 2005. Available at: <http://aesop2005.scix.net/data/papers/att/606.fullTextPrint.pdf>.

port-city links in the long term appear to be more nuanced. For example, one surveyed long-time resident defined the skyline of Kop van Zuid as something unpleasant in the eyes of “true Rotterdammers” and not respectful of the city’s identity. When asked whether they felt they were in a port city, two young American tourists observed that the city’s skyline (the reason why they visited Rotterdam) hardly made them think of the port (which they were by no means interested in). Some interviewees stressed how many policy makers, especially in the 1990s and 2000s, perceived the city’s port image as an issue: “I was always very surprised [by] how negatively they see [the] port, how negatively they want to get rid of the port feeling from their city;”³⁹ “most cultural policy makers always have this mantra of ‘we’ve got to get rid of this [...] port city image. We’ve got to get culture in [until] it becomes a cultural city, instead of a port city.”⁴⁰ A city policy maker also underlined how urban regeneration and cultural policies in the last couple of decades had transformed Rotterdam into an attractive European metropolis and added: “more people live here, more people are proud of it [...] like [in] a normal city”.⁴¹ This tendency to prioritise cultural consumption and the city’s attractiveness over Rotterdam’s maritime identity shows how port city policy makers may have perceived or are perceiving their city’s maritime exceptionalism as a sort of competitive disadvantage.

Nevertheless, the last decade has heralded signs of a shift towards a different attitude that embraces Rotterdam’s maritime character. The impacts of the 2008 crisis made the economic relevance of the port very clear and led local policy makers to abandon the idea that a port city that is attractive to cultural producers and consumers, tourists, businesses and professionals can be considered as independent from its port.⁴² The nexus between the city’s maritime identity and its cultural attractiveness is celebrated in some of the city’s branding campaigns, such as Rotterdam Maritime Capital of Europe.⁴³ In addition, the *Wereldhavendagen* (World Port Days), the event held every year in September to celebrate Rotterdam’s relationship with its port, has gradually grown into a large-scale maritime festival⁴⁴ and a flagship event in the city’s cultural calendar.

Rotterdam is therefore an example of a port city where, in the last decades, policy makers have perceived maritime exceptionalism as ‘problematic’ and have prioritised generalist consumption over the city’s maritime identity. As a result, cultural demaritimisation is visible for

39 Interview, expert1, 2018.

40 Interview, expert2, 2018.

41 Interview, city planner1, 2018.

42 Martin Aarts et al., “How to Develop an Unprecedented Port-City Synergie,” *Urban Design* 138 (2016): 27.

43 City of Rotterdam, *Rotterdam Maritime Capital of Europe*, 2020, available at: <https://www.rotterdammaritimecapital.com/>.

44 Erwin Van Tuijl and Leo Van den Berg, “Annual City Festivals as Tools for Sustainable Competitiveness: The World Port Days Rotterdam,” *Economies* 4, no. 11 (2016): 5–6.

example in redeveloped waterfronts celebrating the relationship between contemporary architecture and water, rather than connecting with their maritime past.

The 'waterfront city': maritime branding and cultural remaritimisation

Many urban regeneration and waterfront development schemes in European port cities have attempted to promote the imaginary of the 21st century 'waterfront city.' The resemblance among many waterfronts across the world can be seen as the result of the willingness of policy makers to both follow the path of allegedly successful experiences of waterfront redevelopment and to meet visitors' expectations about contemporary urban waterfronts. From this perspective, the exploitation of the—not necessarily authentic—maritime feeling of an area is a key selling point and contributes to the standardisation of redeveloped port cityscapes.⁴⁵

The case of Valencia illustrates how forms of cultural remaritimisation that override local meanings attributed to the port and the sea may be pursued as a political goal. The 1990s Balcón al Mar vision was intended as a retail- and leisure-oriented redevelopment of the inner harbour, inspired by the redevelopment of Barcelona's Port Vell. If it had been implemented, the project would have transformed the area into a public space, targeting primarily the local middle class. On the basis of Barcelona's experience, it appears possible to argue that this transformation might have encouraged a closer bond between Valencians and the historic harbour. Conversely, in the mid-2000s, Port America's Cup was designed as a lavish urban environment, targeting the upper class and foreign tourists. As in other redeveloped historic harbours, a superyacht marina was built. Despite the fact that the America's Cup 2007 had an immediate positive impact on the economy⁴⁶ and on civic pride⁴⁷ and was commented as an enjoyable event by some of the surveyed residents, it was not sufficient in itself to 'humanise' the redeveloped port.⁴⁸ After the event, this area was not immediately used by the local community, who gradually took hold of

45 For a definition of port cityscapes, see: Carola Hein, "Port Cityscapes. A Networked Analysis of the Built Environment," in *Port Cities. Dynamic Landscapes and Global Networks*, ed. Carola Hein (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 5.

46 The economic impact of the America's Cup 2007 was estimated in a 2.67% increase in the region's GDP and a 3.29% increase in employment in the region, see IVIE, *Impacto Económico de la 32a America's Cup Valencia 2007. Informe final, diciembre 2007* (Valencia: IVIE, 2007).

47 According to a study by the University of Valencia, 74% of residents felt proud about the fact that the event took place in their city, see UVEG, *Informe sociológico sobre la Gestión Deportiva Municipal en Valencia* (Valencia: Universitat de València, 2009).

48 Cultural events and spectacles may be used to 'humanise' (i.e. to help people assimilate) real estate developments. Sharon Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995), 22.

	Rotterdam	Valencia
Cultural demaritimisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> port city image perceived as a 'policy issue' in past decades focus on cultural consumption and attractiveness, to the detriment of maritime identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> maritime heritage assets not mobilised or concealed by redevelopments focus on cultural consumption and attractiveness, to the detriment of maritime identity
Cultural remaritimisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> key role of contemporary architecture and water to brand the city (e.g. through cultural programming) recent awareness of the role of maritime identity in port competitiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> new, artificial maritime feeling sought to target upper classes and visitors recent attempts to mobilise/restore maritime heritage assets

TAB. 1 Aspects of cultural demaritimisation and remaritimisation in the case-study cities. Author's work.

it in the following years.⁴⁹ Surveyed residents and visitors show little interest in, and in some cases awareness of, Valencia's character as a port city.

It appears possible to argue that cultural demaritimisation and, in particular, remaritimisation played a role in this process. The redevelopment of the historic harbour failed to mobilise existing maritime heritage assets, such as the historic shipyards known as Les Drassanes. Rather, the America's Cup team bases built on the harbourside profoundly transformed the port cityscape and concealed some heritage assets in the area.⁵⁰ Existing symbolic port-city links and meanings attributed to the ports were overridden by creating a new waterfront environment displaying some of the post-modern features highlighted by Norcliffe et al.⁵¹ and targeting middle and upper classes. As mentioned by a senior officer of a local institution, this approach to the transformation of the harbour—and the seafront more in general, as in the case of Avenida de Blasco Ibañez—"was a will [...] to impose to [...] Valencia [...] a certain manner to be by the sea [...]".⁵²

Since the mid-2010s however, a combination of factors including the impacts of the 2008 crisis,⁵³ a local fiscal crisis generated by mega events and large-scale projects⁵⁴ and the demise of the local government in office since 1991, changed the picture. In the last years, urban and cultural policies have displayed attempts to reconnect Valencia with its maritime history and heritage, suggesting that a different process of remaritimisation, one closer to local meanings, might be at play. An example is the renewed

49 Interview, policy maker1, 2018.

50 Interview, policy maker2, 2018.

51 Norcliffe et al., "Postmodernism on Urban Waterfronts", 132.

52 Interview, event team member1, 2018.

53 Josep Sorribes, *Valencia 1940-2014: Construcción y destrucción de la ciudad*. Valencia: Universitat de València, 2015.

54 Amparo Tarazona Vento, "Mega-Project Meltdown: Post-Politics, Neoliberal Urban Regeneration and Valencia's Fiscal Crisis," *Urban Studies* 54, no. 1 (January 2017): 68–84, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098015625025>.

interested in a multi-venue maritime museum,⁵⁵ which would mobilise a number of maritime heritage assets that were overlooked in past policies.

Valencia is an example of how cultural remaritimisation may be implemented as a political goal. Policy makers first sought to establish a new connection between the city and the sea by redeveloping the historic harbour into an environment targeting upper classes and foreign tourists, to the detriment of maritime history and heritage. More recently, the approach shifted towards the restoration of maritime heritage for example through heritage-led regeneration.

Conclusions: towards a holistic view of cultural de/re-maritimisation

This paper has explored the cultural dimension of the concepts of demaritimisation and remaritimisation that is hinted at by many port-city specialists. It has proposed the terminology ‘cultural demaritimisation’ and ‘cultural remaritimisation’ of port cities to describe respectively the erosion of local maritime distinctiveness, culture and heritage and the restoration or introduction of new meanings associated with the city’s maritime identity. It has shown how culture-led urban regeneration schemes in European port cities play a role in these processes, as a consequence of cultural urban policy or as a result of political choices, providing examples from the experience of Rotterdam and Valencia.

Aspects of cultural demaritimisation and remaritimisation are visible in the experience of both cities, where policy makers have prioritised cultural consumption to the detriment of maritime heritage and identity. In Rotterdam, cultural demaritimisation was visible in past decades in the tendency among policy makers to perceive the port city image as problematic. Valencia is an example of how cultural remaritimisation was actively pursued to create a new, saleable image building on the city’s proximity to the sea, rather than on its maritime history and heritage. More recently, changing attitudes among policy makers towards the port city image are visible. In Rotterdam, policy makers are increasingly framing the cultural attractiveness of the city as an aspect contributing to port competitiveness. In Valencia, cultural remaritimisation is now being pursued through attempts to restore and mobilise the city’s maritime heritage.

Recent studies do explore the erosion or transformation of local maritime cultures. Nonetheless, the use of the terms demaritimisation and remaritimisation to analyse these processes could help frame them and connect with other disciplines such as transport economics and port governance, encouraging more holistic accounts of the negotiation of symbolic port-city links.

55 Enrico Tommarchi, ‘Port Cities, Heritage Cities. A Comparative Perspective on Maritime Cultural Quarters,’ *PortusPlus* 9 (2020): 11–12. Interview, policy maker3, 2018.

At the time of writing, it is not clear to what extent local policy makers will be able to rely on culture, leisure and tourism as catalysts for urban development and regeneration in a post-pandemic world. Further research could explore whether a renewed awareness of the economic role of the port and of the significance of local maritime identity—observed in Rotterdam after the 2008 crisis and in Valencia after 2015—is set to emerge more broadly across European port cities as a consequence of the economic downturn related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article builds on the findings of a broader research project undertaken in 2016-2020 and funded by the University of Hull through a PhD scholarship on culture-led regeneration.

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