



## PRACTICES

# Landscape Perspectives for the Port-City Relationship. Reporting from the Workshops of Taranto, Brindisi and Bari

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## ABSTRACT

This article delivers the report of a cycle of three workshops dedicated to urban water and port city landscape, which took place in Taranto (2018), Brindisi (2019) and Bari (2021). These experiences, co-ordinated by Prof. Michael Jakob and Ing. Arch. Maria Cristina Petralla, aimed to analyse the current status and design the future of these territories, focusing on their landscape elements. The coexistence and overlapping of different spatial uses and conflicts have been investigated, between development and protection. Common elements and differences of each port city's cultural heritage were evaluated, in order to develop a coherent landscape-oriented approach that can lay the foundations for an inclusive and resilient re-design process. After a short overview regarding the water culture and maritime mindset of each case studies and the specificities of each workshop, the article reflects on the role of participative workshops as practices enabling collaborative decision-making and fostering the recognition of the port cityscape as a driver of shared development perspective.

## KEYWORDS

*Water Cultural Landscapes; Port City Heritage; Community Engagement; Participative Workshop; Southern Adriatic and Ionian Seas.*

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## Introduction

The Apulian cities of Taranto, Brindisi and Bari, facing the Mediterranean Sea with heterogeneous and distinctive characteristics, hosted as case studies the editions of a research workshop cycle, organised and coordinated by Prof. Michael Jakob – Professor at HEPIA Genève, Politecnico di Milano, Accademia di Architettura USI Mendrisio and EPFL of Lausanne – and Ing. Arch. Maria Cristina Petralla – landscape architect and former lecturer at Oslo School of Architecture and Design and Politecnico di Milano – with the contribution of Prof. João Nunes – PROAP and Accademia di Architettura USI Mendrisio – and Arch. Anna Maria Curcuruto – member of the Sea Resource Partnership Body promoted by Port System Authority of Southern Adriatic Sea,<sup>1</sup> as expert in spatial planning and urban plans drafting.

The epistemological statute of the workshops consisted of a landscape approach to the territory, understanding its history, reading critically its present and contributing to its future, by re-designing the interaction spaces between city and sea. Thus, the common premise lies in the interest for urban landscapes and their water cultural heritage, as potential value. Further, motivations were, on one hand, the stakeholders' commitment to support theoretical research with an operational mandate aiming to offer external perspectives on local dynamics and decision-making processes, while integrating ongoing initiatives; on the other, the intentions to experiment an unconventional, a-hierarchical and itinerant workshop model, setting up an interdisciplinary and international best practice.

The core topics explored during the three workshops have been: the port-city border and the water-city interface; the reciprocal influence of port and urban transformations; and the integration of a landscape architecture perspective within this development. These aspects were addressed according to Taranto, Brindisi and Bari peculiar maritime mindsets and port-city cultural heritages, starting from the relationship with the waterfront. The workshops were structured as one week-long activities with reflective insights feeding into the creative design processes [Fig. 1].

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1 Public body aimed at guiding, planning and coordinating the system of ports of Bari, Brindisi, Manfredonia, Barletta and Monopoli. The Authority was established by Legislative Decree no. 169 of 4 August 2016 "Reorganisation, rationalisation and simplification of the regulations concerning the Port Authorities referred to in Law no. 84 of 28 January 1994, in implementation of Article 8, paragraph 1, letter f), of Law no. 124 of 7 August 2015". "Autorità di Sistema Portuale del Mare Adriatico Meridionale," ADSPMAM, accessed December 22, 2021, <https://www.adspmam.it/>



FIG. 1 Exploration by sea between the Mare Piccolo and Mare Grande of Taranto, Photo by Amina Chouairi.

## The Evolution

*Taranto, una Passeggiata. Paesaggio e Acqua* was the first workshop held in Taranto in May 2018. Solely researching on site for 'the true meaning of things', this earliest edition was the most reflective and analytical one, strongly influenced by the strength and, great sensitivity of the place. This approach, aiming at understanding the city and its delicate dynamics, has prepared the ground for the methodological approach developed within the following editions.

The four days were dedicated to four districts of Taranto and their challenges: *the Old City and the Water* deepened the water element in the citizens' mental map; *the Seas of Taranto, the Rediscovery of Places* explored Ex Torpediniere, Direzione Munizionamento Buffoluto, Villa Capecelatro and Cheradi Islands; *the Other Mar Piccolo* investigated the nature, reclamation and uses of the Galeso River; *Tamburi: So Far, So Near* reflected on the historical relationship with the two seas (Mar Piccolo and Mar Grande), while distancing the port-city identity from the Navy's presence, and on the value of the collective memory of people and places.

*Brindisi. Porto e Confine*, second edition held in May 2019, was the occasion to undertake a more specific investigation, still through the lens of sensory and phenomenological knowledge of places. The comprehensive analysis focused on the port as 'subject' and 'object', and the many levels of investigation were contextualised in the particular tripartition of the port, subdivided into outer, middle and inner harbours.

The reading focused on the port as 'subject' and 'object', in accordance with its particular tripartition, subdivided into 'outer', 'middle' and 'inner'. Through historical phases of development and decay, the city of Brindisi is now aspiring to shape its future and needs in balance with the port, healing the wounds of a recent industrial past [Fig. 2].



FIG. 2 Traditional rowing in the inner harbour of Brindisi. Photo by Silvia Sivo.

During the workshop, the port phenomenon and its relationship with the city was defined in its conceptual, material and immaterial contours, giving sense to its limits. At the same time, the port-city border was decoded, looking at from both land and sea spaces – public and private ones – and disclosing its representations in the mental map of the community that lives it every day and of those who cross it for the first time. This ‘line’, as synthetic materialisation of dynamic relationship systems, is nothing but a complex and constantly evolving representation of the port itself, intrinsically linked with transport and trade innovations.

*Ti Porto a Bari*, the third workshop held in Bari in September 2021 during the *BiArch - Bari International Archifestival*,<sup>2</sup> implemented the design philosophy with a more intervention-oriented approach. The aim was to achieve an original, inclusive, resilient and socially equitable design interpretation, integrating functional planning and operational interventions in the port with landscape architecture, starting with the green, blue and grey infrastructure. The chosen approach tried to give depth to the pragmatic needs combining them with a layering of values and arguments, by designing along and across the borderline between the urban tissue and the port areas, and highlighting the relational dynamics between the different actors involved.

The main aspect of investigation was the mutual claiming of space between the Bari port – which has been surrounded by the city but represents a separate body of it – and the urban surrounding – which ask for a direct contact with water by experiencing the multiplicity of waterfront uses as shared maritime identity. The design of the borderline between

2 Winner of the “Festival of Architecture” competition promoted by the Italian Ministry of Culture’s Directorate General for Contemporary Creativity. “Biarch - Bari International Archifestival,” accessed December 20, Biarch, 2021, <https://biarch.org/>.

three peculiar port areas and the urban fabric and communities addressed the reexamination not only in terms of its overlapping of meanings and values, but also regarding the planning, the development, and the commercial and public uses areas, in order to tackle contemporary conflicts and challenges of coexistence of local and regional issues.

## The Workshop Process: Premises, Methodology, Approach, Objectives and Outcomes

The main assumption of the workshops' design philosophy lies in the conviction that the appropriate perspective for bringing continuity and coherence to Taranto, Brindisi and Bari the port cities' interaction is the landscape one. In fact, applying a landscape vision favours a flexible time-frame by meaning the project as an evolving continuum, rather than a result fixed *a priori* and rigidly crystallising the change at the moment of realisation. Moreover, the landscape perspective implies another essential aspect: the transformation can only be meant as a whole. It is not possible to isolate the Old Cities from the other spatial components – such as the 19th-century centres, the industrial areas, the military enclaves and the hinterland itself – nor to act in terms of punctual operations, because the object of intervention is a living system, in which the overlapping of urban conditions, infrastructures, water system management, soil protection, biodiversity, human activities and so on have to be dealt with together in an extremely complex open context. In the long run, landscape is what survives in a given area.<sup>3</sup>

According to this intellectual position, the research questions address on one hand how to investigate, rethink and re-designed, from a landscape architectonic perspective, the relations between urban contexts, waterfronts and port facilities; on the other hand, how tangible and intangible elements of fragmentations – military areas, port facilities, obsolete spaces and undervalued historical landmarks – play a role as connectors and drivers of a continuous and dynamic port cityscape.<sup>4</sup> More in detail, three peculiar sub-questions were discussed, in order to frame and seize more site-specific related issues:

- How can the city of Taranto re-constitute the millenary relation with its seas, processing the collective repressed induced by the presence of the navy and the steel industry?
- How can the city of Brindisi re-establish the coherent limits connected with the portuality and its relationship with the sea?

3 Michael Jakob and Maria Cristina Petralla, "#OpenTaranto: il paesaggio va costruito insieme, non sprechiamo l'occasione!", *Giornale dell'Architettura*, September 18, 2017, <https://ilgiornaledellarchitettura.com/2017/09/18/opentaranto-il-paesaggio-va-costruito-insieme-non-sprechiamo-loccasione/>.

4 Carola Hein, "The Port Cityscape: Spatial and Institutional Approaches to Port City Relationships," *PORTUSplus* 8 (December 29, 2019), <https://portusplus.org/index.php/pp/article/view/190>.

- How can the city of Bari re-discover the continuity and openness of its waterfront, from the Old City to San Cataldo, coexisting with the evolving port infrastructure?

Despite the specific place of interest, the three workshops intentionally share a common methodology, aiming to answer the research questions and sub-questions proposed:

- The multiplicity of gaze: each participant brings his or her own 'piece of truth' and specific knowledge. This multiplicity can vary by experience – students, PhD students, professors, professionals – and expertise – architects, artists, engineers, photographers, landscape architects, writers, filmmakers, biologists, agronomists, journalists, and fishermen, inhabitants, local politicians, port operators, etc. – contributing to an open contamination and mutual learning environment.
- The horizontality: the research and design process is shared and elaborated by all during the workshop days. Everyone is encouraged to express his or her position, respecting the different professionalisms and skills, and to enhance each one's specificity. The promotion of a-hierarchical and transversal activities is similarly fostered.
- The centrality of learning-by-doing: acknowledging the importance of 'walking' through places.<sup>5</sup> The careful *in situ* study of a place's characteristics, in order to understand it through the look and the perspective of those who inhabit and manage it, leads towards the critical reflection on planning tools.
- The holistic landscape approach: the study of the place's characteristics and components – climate, hydrography, topography, soil composition, vegetation, urban tissues, socio-economic trends – leads to a diachronic and interscalar understanding capable of conceiving the project as a palimpsest for future implementation.
- The intangible but not ephemeral outcomes: the widespread dissemination of new inputs. Despite the workshops' conception cannot imply a definite result *a priori*, the declared intent and outcome is to disseminate on different levels, such as the disclosure of specialised concepts and themes to a wider public and local citizens. At the same time, the restitution of contents to local authorities and promoters of the workshop becomes crucial, in order to enhance the rethinking of current actions in a systematic way and according to a long-term temporal perspective, thus taking on both a symbolic and pragmatic value.

The workshop format resulted as a research practice and methodology, since the theoretical reflections were conveyed in the study of domain-related case studies. This perspective helped in exploring relevant factors, providing means for understanding complex environments and relational

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5 "L'urbanistica si fa con i piedi" as one of the most representative phrases by Italian urbanist Bernardo Secchi.

dynamics, and identifying non-obvious items to either participants and local actors prior to starting the workshop process. Simultaneously, the workshop provided an open platform in which participants and the local actors worked together and interacted with the places. In this way, the development of the activities proceeded according to an evolutionary dimension, allowing all those involved to overcome the limits of the individual perspective and thus to understand the mutual and collective experience [Fig. 3].



FIG. 3 Moment of discussion between participants and local experts in Taranto Vecchia, photo by Paola Iacobellis.

The overall leading objective of the workshops was to achieve an original, inclusive, resilient and comparative interpretation of the port city interaction as the main topic investigated. According to this aim, the suggestions were translated into coherent reflections and design proposals, in order to foster co-planning spatial and institutional approaches to port city relationships and integrate the traditional sectoral planning through a landscape approach.

Another main objective was to encourage local citizens to participate in the life of the port, to raise awareness on the maritime heritage among the local communities and to show the importance of setting up channels of communication and interaction on the territory. Therefore, the workshop was designed as a vehicle of dissemination of port culture at different levels, also involving port managers, operators and workers as guides during the explorations and surveys and as ambassadors for the initiative. As a result, all the participatory activities contributed in creating a sense of belonging to the different port and city communities, providing local citizens and students with the opportunity to experience the multiple facets of the port ecosystem.

This outcome was also triggered by an integrated communication program throughout the workshop, with a coordinated visual identity redesigned in every edition (posters, informative brochures, advertising in local newspapers and sector press). Likewise, dedicated informative channels and social media were a permanent support, together with press conferences and several press reminders providing information on the workshop evolution and public events.

## **The Participatory Dimension: Stakeholders and Communities Engagement**

In accordance with its co-evolutionary character, landscape architecture was intended as the result of an active and constant dialogue between the numerous bodies and people directly or indirectly involved in the port and city interaction, that pursue different goals and promote conflicting functions. Therefore, a concrete mission of the workshop was to engage all the stakeholders belonging to the spaces of the waterfront, the port and on neighboring urban and rural territories. The participatory approach was aimed at promoting the 'restorative' quality of the landscape architecture project, and enhancing a collaborative framework for landscape re-conceptualization.

The need for a different approach, oriented towards care and restoration, was meant as necessary also for the understanding of the human component of the landscape, which is conceived in a systemic key and, according to a long-term temporal perspective, assumed on both a symbolic and pragmatic value. The different three case studies contexts appeared paradigmatic in this perspective, and have served as stages of reflection on this aspect.

The Taranto, Brindisi and Bari workshops have created the opportunity to engage apparently very distant realities and institutions, supporting the single contributions to the upgrade towards a bigger picture. Since the very beginning, the projects have been the result of intense collaborations among various partners, organizations and associations, local communities and participants, which can be summarized in three main categories plus one.

- The Partners, which have supported the workshops both administratively and financially,<sup>6</sup> by providing the Participants with adequate working spaces and means, support, hints and suggestions.

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<sup>6</sup> The Partners were: Comune di Taranto, Comune di Brindisi, Comune di Bari, Regione Puglia, Ambasciata di Svizzera in Italia, Autorità di Sistema Portuale del Mare Adriatico Meridionale (AdSP MAM), Confindustria Brindisi, Associazione Nazionale Costruttori Edili (ANCE) - Bari and Barletta-Andria-Trani.

- The Organizations and Associations, which have contributed with professional and local knowledge to the public program of the workshops,<sup>7</sup> training both the Participants and Local Communities about governance strategies, upcoming actions and policies.
- The Local Communities, which have highlighted hidden potentialities and tangible issues of the places investigated, and could be metaphorically referred to as the workshop's magnifying glasses, able to direct the Participants and the Organizations and Associations' attention towards new food for thought.
- The Participants, representing not only the protagonists of the activities, but the actual 'agent for the territory'. Students and scholars have determined the workshops' success and contributed through their cultural backgrounds, professions and affiliations, to give coherence, heterogeneity and interdisciplinarity of the final results.<sup>8</sup>

In particular, the public events – collective inspections, debates, open discussions, final exhibitions – were one of the pivotal elements of the workshop and its design philosophy. During the workshop program, all the three editions were characterised by these conversational moments, as opportunities to put together and compare the ideas collected during the walks and, above all, to confront directly with the people and expert professionals in the area. The events and conferences were open to the public, as were the exhibitions and presentations in significant and widely frequented places – the Castello Aragonese in Taranto, Palazzo Nervegna in Brindisi, the Cruise Terminal in Bari [Fig. 4].

In concrete terms, these moments have enhanced the most varied interventions possible and promoted a culture of quality confrontation, characterised by proactivity and constructiveness. Thus, the analysis of physical space was flanked by the reflection of the relationship spaces, especially concerning the transformation from challenge to opportunities, the examination of the flexible coalitions of actors in different power positions, the sharing and exchange of knowledge between competent professionals and people with experiences.

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7 The Organizations and Associations were: Fondazione Gianfranco Dioguardi, Legambiente, AIAPP - Associazione Italiana di Architettura del Paesaggio, INU - Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica, Ordine degli Architetti, Pianificatori, Paesaggisti e Conservatori della Provincia di Brindisi, Ordine degli Ingegneri della Provincia di Brindisi, Ordine degli Architetti, Pianificatori, Paesaggisti e Conservatori della Provincia di Bari, Ordine degli Ingegneri della Provincia di Bari, Inarch Puglia, Soprintendenza Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio per le province di Brindisi e Lecce e Città Metropolitana di Bari.

8 According to the principle of non-verticality, with "Participants" were considered both the effective students who have contributed to the workshop, the experts guested and the organisation team. The Participants were affiliated with: Politecnico di Milano, Accademia di Architettura di Mendrisio, HEPIA - Haute École du Paysage, d'Ingénierie et d'Architecture de Genève, HEAD - Haute École d'Art et de Design de Genève, Accademia di Brera, The Oslo School of Architecture and Design, Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro, Politecnico di Bari, Università Ca' Foscari, Master in Pianificazione e Progettazione Sostenibile delle Aree Portuali at Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II.



FIG. 4 View of the public exhibition in Palazzo Nervegna of Brindisi, photo by Amina Chouairi.

## Conclusions

The three editions in Taranto, Brindisi and Bari saw the workshops as 'open texts', with an approach on the territory that favoured dialogical and experimental methodologies based on collaboration, involving the local actors in sharing this approach. This chosen attitude has combined the heuristic – professionals must return to study *in situ* – and ethical – professionals and citizens are together responsible for the good development of the territories –, the scientific – academics are expected to spread and synthesize the scientific research – and aesthetic – the artistic gaze is not ancillary, but essential – aspects.



FIG. 5 Moment of participatory site inspection along the waterfront of San Cataldo in Bari, ph. Sara Quartarella.

Through a balanced programming of experiential activities, research-based patterns, technical insights and participatory interviews, a crucial framework was composed, in order to acknowledge the port-city interface, connections and their tangible and intangible elements as ‘commons’ for a shared sustainable development path. The conceptual suggestions and design traces brought together visions about the shape and scale of spatial and relational impacts, places of conflict and opportunity for these port cities.

All the editions highlighted, in varying degrees, how the workshop itself dealt with two fundamental issues: the need for new theoretical, methodological and scalar approaches for governance, and the emerging role of landscape in harmonising the existence of contemporary uses and the disclosure of the ports’ and maritime heritage. Hence, the promotion of the port cityscape awareness as a driver of a shared development perspective acts as a trigger to bringing together the different actors involved in the decision-making, and the confrontation between these ones and those communities who are usually at best informed of, and more often suffer, such decisions.

The co-design environment has shown how a collaborative approach can identify bottlenecks and steer challenges towards management forms that avoid the frictions typical of traditional institutional systems. The role of the border between port and city as a cultural identity element bonding communities to places helped the recognition of shared values and to focus on the emergence of possible conflicts. This approach fosters the management of heritage resources in dynamic and constantly changing environments – according to the Unesco Historic Urban

Landscape recommendations –<sup>9</sup> to which all future interventions and development choices should be redirected [Fig. 5].

Looking ahead, the possible implementations and impacts of the workshops could actively contribute firstly to systematise collaborative dynamics between the port and city actors; in second place, to propel administrators and decision-makers to a solid community outreach, enabling them in building a public imagination and wide consensus in operating socially. Lastly, the application of the landscape architecture potential in the planning and design, with an enabling role in enhancing the actors' agency thanks to a deeper interpretation of the territory, could improve the governance of situations of extreme complexity such as port city regions.

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9 The Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape is a "soft-law" to be implemented by Member States on a voluntary basis, and not replaces the existing doctrines or conservation approaches. Rather, it is an additional tool to integrate policies and practices of conservation of the built environment into the wider goals of urban development, in respect of the inherited values and traditions of different cultural contexts. "Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape," UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed December 20, 2021, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/hul/>.

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**Silvia Sivo** is an engineer and architect, has a II level Master in Sustainable Planning and Design of Port Areas at Federico II University of Naples. In recent years she has been collaborating with the Southern Adriatic Sea Port System Authority for the drafting of the System Strategic Planning Document and regarding the Port City School, a training programme on the governance of port cities. She is currently a PhD student in Regional Planning and Public Policies in IUAV University of Venice, and a member of the international team of the PortCityFutures research programme (Leiden-Delft-Erasmus Universities).

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## Figures and illustrations

The photographs and drawings included in this article were taken and produced during the workshops by the participants and organization team.