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EDITORIAL

Innovative Methods for Studying and Shaping Cultures in Port City Territories

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Following part 1 of *Port City Cultures, Values, and Maritime Mindsets*, this issue explores how cultures of port city territories are put into words, visualized, and can even be shaped. Continuing the argument that port city territories merit particular attention due to their location at the border of sea and land and the presence of global and local interests and stakeholders of differing sizes, this issue emphasizes once more the role that culture, values, and mindsets can play in understanding the historical relations and socio-spatial features of port cities, their socio-cultural construction, and their future design. The issue emphasizes the value of considering ways of perceiving, defining, and classifying port cities in relation to social context and powerful processes of meaning-making in academia and in the wider society.

The articles in this second volume of the special issue take inspiration from the first volume. Acknowledging the influence of time and place-bound

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(cultural) conventions for academic framing pushes scholars to develop new methods, to lay bare implicit assumptions, and to explore tacit values undergirding studies of port city life worlds. The first four articles demonstrate how new and diverse methods make it possible to address bias in current ways of academic knowing, perceiving, and valuing port cities in both their external and internal socio-spatial relations. The articles show that methodological breaks from conventional practice – with alternative choices of historical sources, wording, and critique of standard perceptions of port city spaces – yield much-needed multivocality in narrations and plurality in perceptions. The last two articles of the special issue propose follow-up steps to link analysis to cultural activism and design.

Awareness that values and cultural conventions are created in tangible social practices implies that academics may contribute to processes of reshaping value orientations and cultural meanings. Contributors to this special issue propose ways of opening new thinking-space with which to tackle the contemporary challenges of port city regions. Such thinking-space helps alternative future pathways to emerge. Several contributors take this step further by straddling lines between academic, design, and activist work. They analyze how they co-create cultural events to engage with new forms of maritime mindsets, discussed in this volume as “a shared mindset of port city actors formed through the location and century-old investments,” the “presence—or absence—” of which “shapes future development in port-city-regions”.¹ The contributions to this second volume of the special issue describe port city cultures in the (re)making, so to speak.² Methodological innovations and academics as ‘cultural agents’ are key elements of this special issue, the first part of which emphasizes (re)making academic models and the second the (re) shaping of port city cultures, values, and futures.

The first two contributions in the first section show the importance of scrutinizing how histories of port cities are narrated. Maya Vinai uses works of fiction for memorializing port city cultures as an alternative and additional source of knowledge for narrating port city histories. Tianchen Dai, Carola Hein, and Dan Baciu use textual analysis to explore how port city heritage is described on the UNESCO World Heritage Centre website. Both contributions argue that verbalizations—genres in writing and

1 Tianchen Dai, Carola Hein, Dan Baciu, “Heritage Words: Exploring Port City Terms,” *The European Journal of Creative Practices in Cities and Landscapes* 4, no. 2 (2021): 36-59.

2 Robert J. Foster, “Making National Cultures in the Global Ecumene,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 20, no. 1 (1991): 235–60, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.20.100191.001315>; Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Ton Otto and Poul Pedersen, “Disentangling Traditions: Culture, Agency and Power,” in *Tradition and Agency: Tracing Cultural Continuity and Invention*, ed. Ton Otto and Poul Pedersen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2005), 11–49; Orlando Patterson, “Making Sense of Culture,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 40, no. 1 (July 30, 2014): 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-071913-043123>; Malte Fuhrmann, *Port Cities of the Eastern Mediterranean: Urban Culture in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108769716>.

choices of words—are cultural expressions which matter. Words can shape and change the world.

The next two contributions move from verbal to visual methods by showing how images of port cities matter. Maurice Hartevelde presents a creative way to identify blind spots in ways of “seeing port cities.” He experiments with mental mapping to redress visual gaps in portraying port-city relations and improve collaboration in the field of port city governance. Rachel Seoighe and Hernán Cuevas address the politics of visual culture by studying how photographs of slum neighborhoods and abandoned, deindustrialized harbor areas beautify decay to serve the gaze of tourists. Their analysis also points to blind spots in visual narration that excludes experiences of poverty and inequalities.

The authors contributing to the second section combine their analysis with explicit attempts to translate academic knowledge into future-making and societal interventions. Carola Hein, Ingrid Mulder, and Hilde Sennema propose methods for enhancing what they call “value literacy”. The authors propose that stakeholders deliberate values purposefully to aid the future planning and design of port cities. In the final contribution, Maria Elena Buslacchi and Maria Pina Usai analyze their own academic/interventionist engagement in organizing cultural festivals as part of the Zones Portuaires Genova experience. Their “research in action” seeks to enhance cultural appreciation of port-city connections through festivals and art.

All contributors engage critically with key debates concerning major characteristics of port cities (which are discussed also in the introduction to part 1 of this special issue). Several authors contribute to rethinking historic socio-spatial dynamics and propose how the re-conceptualization and (re)making of maritime cultures may help redress the effects of the disconnect that has developed between ports and cities.

Section 1: Innovative Methods for Studying Portcity Cultures: Verbalization, Visualization

As nodes in world histories of trade and colonial expansion, port cities continue to bring together a wide range of international actors with very different identities and power positions. This heterogeneity has led scholars to describe port cities as cosmopolitan. However, this gloss has been criticized as too general³ and too restricted in its representation of social

3 Henk Driessen, “Mediterranean Port Cities: Cosmopolitanism Reconsidered,” *History and Anthropology* 16, no. 1 (March 2005): 129–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0275720042000316669>.

differentiation.⁴ In the first part of this special issue, Didem Yerli⁵ argued that class is not sufficiently foregrounded in descriptions of ‘cosmopolitan’ port cities. The author of the first article to appear in this issue, Maya Vinai, also tackles the cosmopolitan model by showing how representations of port cities have been biased as a result of the selection of historical sources: often the sources have been written by relative outsiders engaged in colonial domination. Using mainly Portuguese sources for detailing the political and trade interactions in South Indian ports of Cochin, Malabar, and Travancore since the early fifteenth century has led scholars to portray this region as a cosmopolitan, open world. They attributed the openness to the docility and open-mindedness of the local rulers, who barely resisted new powerholders. By bringing historical sources into conversation with works of fiction, Vinai proposes a very different reading of these port city histories. She reveals diverse approaches to identity politics, ranging from cosmopolitanism to far more exclusionary claims of belonging. By using fictional works as a source of memory, we gain access to alternative images of political entanglements. The contribution is important to the topic of port city cultures because of its methodology and because it shows how cultural expressions such as novels are important entry points for conceptualizing port cities and for (re)valuing maritime mindsets.

Tianchen Dai, Carola Hein, and Dan Baciú pair methodological innovation with a network approach to port cities. Their article assesses UNESCO’s framework of recognizing port cities for Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and for listing them as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The methodological innovation consists of applying textual tools to over 1100 abstracts of World Heritage Sites published on the UNESCO World Heritage Centre website. They examine groups of words describing the typology of buildings and structures associated with port functions and activities. The analysis shows several biases resulting from Eurocentrism, but also from limited object-based definitions and a binary conception of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’. The authors argue that a networked approach to port cities is needed to do justice to global connections in the histories of maritime trade and articulations of nature-culture in processes of shaping port cities on the land-sea continuum. Heritage sites are key elements of culture and we need a close-reading of them as the “micropolitics of architectural space”.⁶ Words matter for the ways in which we can value port cities, their material characteristics, their cultural practices, and their embeddedness in world history. Significantly, the analysis shows how in current abstracts

4 Su Lin Lewis, *Cities in Motion: Urban Life and Cosmopolitanism in Southeast Asia, 1920–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316257937>.

5 Didem Yerli, “What Kind of ‘Cosmopolitics’?: Studying the Eastern Mediterranean Port Cities between East and West,” *The European Journal of Creative Practices in Cities and Landscapes* 4, no. 1 (2021): 21–39.

6 Sandy Prita Meier, *Swahili Port Cities: The Architecture of Elsewhere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 22.

certain material structures related to maritime trade, defense, and colonial practices are highlighted, whereas more daily and cultural practices with relevance for wider groups in society—such as housing, leisure, and religion—are rarely mentioned. Similar to the contribution by Vinai, this article shows how (geo)political inequalities may (still) inform frames for describing and analyzing port cities, and provides alternatives with more encompassing and pluralistic perspectives and value orientations. The work of Dai, Hein, and Baciú can further UNESCO's attempts to re-value port city heritage in wider socio-spatial perspectives—already taken up in the Historic Urban Landscape approach (HUL)—and in relational rather than essentialist approaches to culture.

Maurice Hartevelde's methodological contribution is concerned with the port city of Rotterdam and the effects of recent shifts in port-city relations due to containerization in the 1970s. This shift resulted in spatial distancing between the city and the port infrastructure and social disconnections in collaborations between port and city authorities. Hartevelde argues that these disconnects have been further reinforced in visual practices of designers and planners. Innovative exercises in mental mapping of port cities—e.g., with design students—can help identify and remedy visual gaps and voids. Mental mapping is a participatory and creative methodology with which design students can improve their professional practice. By foregrounding port-city connections—as territorial and infrastructural networks—it is hoped that governing practices can become more encompassing and harmonized.

In a strong political analysis, Rachel Seoighe and Hernán Cuevas Valenzuela describe the socio-economic trajectory of the Chilean port city Valparaíso from a period of global importance to deindustrialization and decline as a result of both authoritarianism and neoliberalism. Meanwhile, derelict port areas have gained aesthetic appeal for tourists. The authors analyze the tensions between, on the one hand, the hardships and dispossession of residents of slum areas in this port city and, on the other, the commodification of ruined urban landscapes by heritagization and constructs of 'authentic' local culture produced mainly for outsiders. Particular attention is given to the role of photographic representations in the 'culturalization' of decaying port city sites. The authors take a critical stance to the re-purposing, rebranding, and marketing of abandoned sites of port infrastructure. The article contributes to a wider literature on what is sometimes called "ruin porn"⁷ or "poverty tourism"⁸ that overlooks

7 Kaitlin Blanchard, "On Being Intimate with Ruin: Reading Decay in Middlesex," *The Goose* 17, no. 1 (2018): 53; Andrew Emil Gansky, "Ruin Porn' and the Ambivalence of Decline: Andrew Moore's Photographs of Detroit," *Photography and Culture* 7, no. 2 (2014): 119–39, <https://doi.org/10.2752/175145214X13999922103084>; Siobhan Lyons, ed., *Ruin Porn and the Obsession with Decay* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93390-0>.

8 Manfred Rolfes, "Poverty Tourism: Theoretical Reflections and Empirical Findings Regarding an Extraordinary Form of Tourism," *GeoJournal* 75, no. 5 (2010): 421–42, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-009-9311-8>.

the slow violence⁹ taking place in these port city areas. The article clearly shows the potential downsides of “making culture and values” and invites critical reflection on future transformations.

Section 2: Culture and Values as Driving Force for Future Making

The last two articles in this special issue point to how co-creation of values and culture can be turned into driving forces for more inclusive future design and novel types of intervention, connecting research to design. Hein, Mulder, and Sennema first analyze the different meanings of value. Stakeholders may often have explicit disagreements about value—e.g., in their weighing of ‘economic’ and ‘ecological’ value—but values are also often implicit. Value literacy, defined as understanding one’s own tacit values and the ability to identify and phrase these values in a conversation, can play an important role in decision-making processes. Value-based and value-driven techniques can enhance value deliberations in planning, policy, business, heritage, and education. Based on experiences and experiments in two interdisciplinary programs (Delft Design for Values and PortCityFutures), the article proposes systematic steps toward developing value-based processes in port cities.

Buslacchi and Pina Usai write about how in Genova they intervened to improve the functioning of the port-city relationship. Developments in Genova have been marked by a decrease in use and value of traditional port spaces, but the abandoned areas have subsequently become the stage of culturalization initiatives. However, the authors argue, the attempts at waterfront revitalization¹⁰ did not explicitly question or attempt to redress the spatial, cultural, and political border between the port and the city. In contrast, the authors were involved in cultural events in the so-called Zones Portuaires, which embraced a political and interventionist agenda. The authors analyze how co-organizing a film festival was extended into an interdisciplinary project incorporating both academic and activist approaches. The authors describe a creative methodology combining research, art, and politics that not only promotes a new port city culture but also alternative governance strategies that integrate port and city, spatially and socially.

In conclusion, this special issue on port city cultures is both critical and constructive. The contributors propose new methods for conceptualizing port cities and their main characteristics—including their global networks and socio-spatial, colonial, and postcolonial dynamics. This leads to new ways of understanding port city histories, diversities, inequalities, and

9 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA. and London: Harvard University Press, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674061194>.

10 Simona Corradini, “Urbanistica di genere per la città portuale,” *Portus Plus*, no. 1 (January 1, 2011).

spatial dynamics. The alternative analyses serve as points of departure for more interventionist contributions. The articles suggest creative methods, strategies for interactions, and cultural interventions to work toward meaningful future-making for port cities in times of climate challenges and steep inequalities. The contributions show that narratives matter and these are often constructed and defended as part of government policies embedded in path dependent trajectories that can influence future interventions. A critical re-evaluation of these narratives can be fruitful in developing new port city strategies for European models as well as challenging these narratives by foregrounding non-European concepts of port city cultures.

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