



ON THE  
**WATERFRONT:**

*CULTURE, HERITAGE AND REGENERATION OF PORT CITIES*

19 – 21 November 2008

BT Convention Centre, Kings Waterfront, Liverpool



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Across the world, historic port cities face the prospect of rapid and far-reaching change as they adjust to constantly evolving economic and cultural circumstances. The question of what role the historic environment – architecture, archaeology and historic landscapes – should play in this process of change is central to the way in which these cities see themselves. There is widespread, although not universal, recognition that the legacy of the past should influence future development but how this is to be achieved and what benefits it brings vary from place to place.

These issues were addressed in a major international conference – *On the Waterfront: Culture, Heritage and Regeneration of Port Cities* – held in Liverpool in November 2008. The conference was organised by a partnership of institutions concerned with different aspects of heritage and regeneration: principal partners were English Heritage, Liverpool City Council, Cities on the Edge, National Museums Liverpool, the University of Liverpool and Liverpool Vision. Speakers, in main sessions and workshops, were drawn from four continents – Europe, Africa, Asia and America – and from many different backgrounds – planning, conservation, academic, museums, heritage, and the voluntary sector – to present a range of perspectives on the challenges facing port cities in efforts to integrate their history into planning for the future.

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*Fig. 1: Canning Dock, Liverpool, with the Royal Liver Building in the background (© English Heritage, National Monuments Record)*

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*Fig. 2: The conference venue: the BT Convention Centre lies adjacent to the Albert Dock (© English Heritage, National Monuments Record)*

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The conference focused on a number of themes. The question of the **identity** of port cities lies at the heart of managing change. It is acknowledged that port cities are distinctive places, different to cities without a primary trading function. But in many historic port cities, identity, at least in terms of their fabric, was formed centuries or decades ago. Each city must attempt to define that identity and address the question of how or why to retain it in planning for the future. John Belchem's contribution takes the case of Liverpool for special study, demonstrating how sub-cultures developed around some of the varied communities which made up 'Sailortown' and how these communities presented challenges to ideas of what constituted society. More firmly based in the historic environment, articles by Paul Smith (Le Havre) and Sarah-Jane Farr and Colum Giles (Liverpool) record efforts to define the special character of two port cities and how the results feed into conservation and management.





Fig.1



Fig.2



Fig.3



Fig.4



Fig.5

The differing **values** attached to the historic environment of port cities was a thread running through the conference and Simon Thurley's article discusses how these might be represented in development plans. The 'expert view' identifies places or buildings with a more than local significance and protects them through designation, but much of the character of port cities lies outside the scope of formal protection measures and depends for its retention on the value placed on it by local communities and the ways in which people interact with port environments in their everyday lives.

**Presentation** of the character of historic port cities has great cultural and economic value. These exciting environments are a magnet for tourism, but they need to be interpreted for different audiences. If well exploited, they not only serve to consolidate the identity of the city but also bring economic benefits which help to sustain the city as a whole. The efforts in Gdansk and Mumbai illustrate two different approaches to presentation. In Gdansk the waterfront and the waterways through the city form the means by which historic character

can be discovered, emphasising the key role which they played in its growth. In Mumbai, awareness of the historic aspects of this fast developing city has been developed by heritage walks which demonstrate how old and new co-exist and help to develop appreciation of what the older quarters contribute to the identity of the port.

*Fig.3: The Liverpool waterfront, with (from left) the Royal Liver Building (1908-11), the Cunard Building (1914-16) (© English Heritage, National Monuments Record)*

*Fig.4: the Gdansk waterfront: historic buildings line the banks of the River Motlava (© Dennis Rodwell)*

*Fig.5: the opening session of the conference, led by Sir Neil Cossons (© English Heritage, National Monuments Record)*

The **economics** of port city regeneration were a major theme of the conference, addressed through perspectives ranging from that of the developer to that of the planner. The impact of cruise tourism in Malta was examined by John McCarthy, who showed how infrastructure projects designed to facilitate tourism need to balance the provision of better facilities with a careful attention to the retention of authenticity and character. The economic value of the historic environment was evident in the location of the conference venue, adjacent to the Albert Dock, re-born in the 1980s as a cultural centre with museums and galleries, hotels and restaurants and craft shops.

Perhaps the most important aspect of port-city regeneration is **governance**. A number of presentations examined the tensions involved in the integration of the historic environment into plans for regeneration. Political and ethnic issues are discussed in Ayodeji Olukoju's examination of Lagos's history as a place of innovation and cultural exchange. Dennis Rodwell's article, ranging over two continents, examines national and local planning policies and sets out the mechanisms which can play a part in regeneration initiatives, from top-down directives, through market-led schemes,

to local community effort. It concludes with a reminder that regeneration is about more than the restoration of fabric, involving as well the capture of the spirit of historic port cities. The search for authenticity and integrity takes us back to the first major theme, that of identity.

The articles taken from the conference are of wide interest in many senses. They deal with a range of themes, cover a broad geographical scope, and present a number of different perspectives on the theme of historic port city regeneration. It is hoped that they will inform the planning of change in many places across the world and illustrate how, if the conditions are right, retention of historic character, far from being an 'optional extra', can help to produce successful places for the future.

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## ARTICLES

- 01 **DR SIMON THURLEY:**  
*Heritage in regeneration: inspiration or irrelevance?*
- 02 **PROFESSOR JOHN BELCHEM:**  
*Shock City: sailortown Liverpool*
- 03 **PAUL SMITH:**  
*Understanding the historic environment: a view from France*
- 04 **SARAH-JANE FARR AND COLUM GILES:**  
*Understanding the historic environment of port cities: the case of Liverpool*
- 05 **JOHN HINCHLIFFE:**  
*The Conservation of Port Heritage: Lessons from Liverpool*
- 06 **LUCYNA NYKA:**  
*Re-gaining Gdansk's water spaces: cultural projects for urban regeneration*
- 07 **ABHA BAHL AND BRINDA GAITONDE NAYAK:**  
*Is Heritage a business opportunity?: The Bombay Heritage Walks*
- 08 **JOHN MCCARTHY:**  
*Is all tourism beneficial? The impacts of port city regeneration initiatives*
- 09 **PROFESSOR AYODEJI OLUKOJU:**  
*Local and global dynamics in the transformation of the port-city of Lagos since the nineteenth century*
- 10 **DENNIS RODWELL:**  
*Planning systems: do they fit the current needs of historic port cities?*

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