

Highlights - introduction

PortCityFutures looks back at a very successful first year. The COVID-19 pandemic has kept us from seeing each other in person throughout 2020, but it did not stop us from pursuing our goal of building a multidisciplinary field around issues of space, society and culture and engaging diverse stakeholders in port city regions. Using a longitudinal approach, studying the past to better understand the present, and to design the future, we work with a multi-scalar and multi-stakeholder approach, exploring buildings, cities and landscapes, analysing public and private stakeholders, port authorities, city governments and citizens.

Since starting in February 2020, we have successfully established a close-knit intellectual community including junior and senior scholars both locally in the Leiden-Delft-Rotterdam region and globally. Our monthly plenary meetings allow us to build a shared vocabulary, literature and collaborate in research and design projects. This collaboration has ties to academic and professional partners worldwide. Our series of over 50 blogs speaks to the breadth of our interests and existing research in the field of spatial, social and cultural studies of port city regions.

The explosion in the Port of Beirut, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted in diverse ways the need for closer investigation of the particular challenges that port city regions face due to their unique location at the edge of sea and land, their particular history of stakeholder engagement and the impact of trade and commodity flows on the port, city and regional spaces. To call attention to the particular needs and opportunities of port city regions at a time of multiple urgencies—climate change, digitization or migration—we have made several [films](#), partially funded by grants from the Dutch research organization NWO. Our collaboration with the Union for the Mediterranean will help us bring our particular approach to other port city regions.

We are convinced that we need a new approach to the shared spaces of ports and cities. We have started to bring together educational activities and look forward to setting up shared educational programs starting with two [MOOCs](#) (Massive Online Open Course), respectively on port cities and water culture. An elective course on Rebuilding the Port of Beirut has already led to collaborations with students and professors in Yale, Miami and Beirut. Locally we are working with Maritime Museum, Wereldhavendagen, and Jurriaanse Foundation.

In our first year, we have initiated several special journal issues, we have published 45 blogs, participated or initiated webinars, and contributed to a new book on The Urbanisation of the Sea. We have attracted funding from diverse sources, including for two postdocs, respectively from China and Germany. Tianchen Dai has obtained a grant from a Chinese company and Nina Alaily Mattar has joined us with an Alexander von Humboldt Foundation grant.

As a group of young and established scholars we focus on building a new research field that is of key importance for port city regions globally and locally.

- Prof. Dr.-Ing. Carola Hein

Highlights

What we accomplished in 2020

Films

- The Magic of Port Cities
- PortCityFutures Rotterdam: a series of films

Blogs

- Beirut Blast: A port city in crisis
- The European Green Deal: New Opportunities for Port Cities?
- Deep Maps and Time Machines: Exciting Times for Collaborative Research on Port Cities

Projects

- The Making of Architecture for Narrative Performance
- Time Travel project - Automated Image Recognition to Improve Long-term Urban Planning in Response to Pandemics

Events

- Protecting Cultural Heritage as a Resource for Sustainable Development of Port Cities (AIVP webinar)
- Insights from the RETE/PortCityFutures Webinar - Port-city scenarios during and after the Covid-19 - May 18th, 2020

Education

- Online open courses: (Re)Imagining Port Cities: Understanding Space, Society and Culture
- Maritime Mindsets of Rotterdam's Port Communities

Films

The Magic of Port Cities

To address challenges of climate change and sea-level rise that will particularly affect port cities and regions, PortCityFutures aims to inform diverse groups of people and bring stakeholders together in the process. The production of the short open access film *The Magic of Port Cities* is a case in point: funded with a NWO KIEM subsidy and sponsored by a diverse group of stakeholders, the animated film takes a playful approach to the understanding of port city regions, and emphasises the need for change that will make possible a sustainable future. We need novel creative approaches to engage non-professional audiences in ongoing transitions. The film informs the general public of both

the particular character of port cities, and of the challenges and opportunities inherent in their location at the edge of sea and land. It makes viewers more aware of future urgencies and helps them define the role they may want to play themselves.



PortCityFutures Rotterdam: a series of films

What does the future of the port city of Rotterdam look like? How do you maintain the identity of a city in transition, with a growing number of inhabitants, spatial, economic and political interests? For whom does the gentrification of a neighbourhood take place? These are some of the questions studied by the researchers of the Leiden-Delft-Erasmus PortCityFutures programme.

Port city regions are places where a large industrial area connects with both urban and rural spaces – yet ports, cities, and regional governments may not necessarily share the same goals. Differences in economic interests, technological capacities, knowledge, or income in a port city can lead to environmental and

social injustice and opposition to the port's functions. We believe there is a need to look at new ways to govern and plan port cities: not only at the waterfront or where the port meets the city, but throughout the surrounding region.



Beirut Blast: A port city in crisis

Asma Mehan and Maurice Jansen

On 4th of August 2020, the Lebanese capital and port city, Beirut, was rocked by a massive explosion that has killed hundreds and injured thousands more, ravaging the heart of the city's nearby downtown business district and neighbouring housing areas, where more than 750,000 people live. The waterfront neighbourhood and a number of dense residential neighbourhoods in the city's eastern part were essentially flattened. Lebanese Government officials believe that the blast was caused by around 2,700 tonnes of ammonium nitrate stored near the city's cargo port without proper control for six years. Such a scenario—keeping highly dangerous goods near dense, lived-in areas—is not unique. Ammonium nitrate is used in fertilizers, but is also effective in mining explosives, where it's mixed with oil and other fuels. Produced as small porous pellets, or “prills”, it's one of the world's most widely used agricultural fertilizers. Ammonium nitrate decomposition can be set off if an explosion occurs where it is stored, or if there is an intense fire nearby. More recently, in 2015, hundreds of tons of ammonium nitrate, among other chemicals, exploded at one of China's busiest seaports, Tianjin, where more than 150 people were killed. It seems that no lessons have been learned.

The European Green Deal: New Opportunities for Port Cities?

Stephan Hauser

With the European Green Deal made public last December, the new European Commission took the first steps to transforming Europe into the first climate neutral continent by 2050. The Green Deal offers a wide range of climate policies and measures that directly affect European cities and citizens. Whereas port cities are high polluters and important economic concentrations, they are not mentioned in the European Green Deal as such. However, to make the “effective and fair transition” that the Commission aims for, port cities could make a difference as they concentrate key economic and industrial facilities and are key to the EU's long-term economic competitiveness.

The success of sustainable planning in industrial port cities would set an example to face climate change and the increasing urbanization of the world. The port of Rotterdam stands as an example. As the first hub of Europe for containers and oil, the port of Rotterdam emits almost 20% of the total Dutch emission of CO₂, which illustrates the significance of port cities on national statistics.

Deep Maps and Time Machines: Exciting Times for Collaborative Research on Port Cities

Vincent Baptist

This blog post continues the ‘Mapping Maritime Mindsets’ discussions by taking inspiration from new research initiatives and recent work in the fields of urban and landscape history. When tackling the topic of port cities, we need to be conscious that different research paths and types of outcomes can be pursued, especially when setting up sustainable collaborations with scholars from various disciplines. Is science becoming more like science fiction? One might easily think so when hearing about a novel research network called Time Machine Europe, or other interdisciplinary collaborations on practices of ‘deep mapping’, for instance. Behind these imaginative keywords, however, are research endeavors that firmly rely on a thorough understanding of the past in order to take on the future. This deceptively simple, yet fundamental stance also shines through many blog contributions from the PortCityFutures team. We have to imagine, design, plan and assess the future of port cities by taking stock of their complex maritime urban histories.

Projects

The Making of Architecture for Narrative Performance

When public actors commission architecture projects, these commissions are always linked to public actors' desire to support political projects. Especially at critical junctures in the development of a collectivity, public actors mobilize architecture to support political projects by constructing cultural references that foreground certain narratives. This research project investigates how publically funded architecture projects are made to perform narratively. The aim is to understand the role of communication and the design process in the production, dissemination and control of narratives.

Facts:

Funder: Alexander von Humboldt Foundation

Co-funding by TUDelft

Programme: Feodor Lynen Fellowship for Experienced Researchers

Role of TU Delft: Host institute

Project Duration: Sep.2020 – Nov. 2021

Grantee: Nadia Alaily-Mattar (Nina)



Time Travel – Automated Image Recognition to Improve Long-term Urban Planning in Response to Pandemics

The corona pandemic endangers lives and livelihoods; it also challenges contemporary European urban planning paradigms that are geared towards high density, public transportation, diversity and compact mixed developments, but current data doesn't allow yet to fully comprehend and visualize the complex socio-spatial interrelation of long-term urban planning and pandemics. Building on the ArchiMediaL approach (Mager et.al 2019; Khademi et al. 2018), combining research in architectural, urban and planning history with cutting-edge image-recognition tools based on crowd-sourcing and AI technology, Time Travel proposes to:

1. develop a methodology to analyze and visualize the complex socio-spatial urban and regional transformations and the impact on urban planning following pandemics using historical maps and texts. The GIS-based methodology of visualizing socio-spatial, health-related short-and long-term transformations at the regional, urban and architecture scale will be
2. discussed in two workshops (methodological and content-focused) with a group of 40-50 key actors, including public officials, professionals from architectural offices and journalists from the City of Hamburg and the Province of South Holland to inform the ongoing debate on corona-related socio-spatial urban and planning developments and practices and to facilitate future design.

Facts:

Applicants:

Prof. Dirk Schubert, HCU HH

Prof. Carola Hein, TU Delft

Ass. Prof. Christoph Lofi, TU Delft

Events



Protecting Cultural Heritage as a Resource for Sustainable Development of Port Cities (AIVP webinar)

Port city functions and cultural maritime heritage are often at odds. Culture is a difficult and sometimes contested concept in the scholarly environment, and functions of maritime identity in port cities, are often not recognized as culture. To discuss this issue, the international port city organization AIVP (Association Internationale Villes Ports) organized a webinar, moderated by PortCityFutures' Carola Hein, last October where representatives of UNESCO and the port authorities of Dubrovnik and Dublin were asked to reflect on this issue. Port culture and identity are part of the AIVP agenda for port cities in 2030, which proposes to promote and capitalise on "the specific culture and identity of port cities and allowing residents to develop a sense of pride and flours as a part of city port community of interest". This blog reports on this webinar, and discusses why the maritime functions of trade, shipping and water are still overlooked when we discuss the culture of a port city.



Insights from the RETE/PortCityFutures Webinar - Port-city scenarios during and after the Covid-19

To what extent is the current health crisis detrimental for port cities, and how are different port cities reacting to this crisis? Researchers and practitioners from around the world discussed this question in a webinar co-organized by RETE and PortCityFutures held on May 18th 2020. (Blogs on the individual contributions are forthcoming on the PortCityFutures website). One of the main questions here was how to navigate between the paradigm of 'never waste a good crisis' on the one hand, and 'business as usual' on the other. Vicent Esteban from the Universitat Politècnica Valencia placed the Covid-19 crisis in a series of disruptions over the last few decades, such as 9/11 and the 2008 financial crisis. He noted that disruptions can have both negative and positive connotations. According to him, the Covid Crisis - beside the obvious negative social and economic implications - has positive effects as well: the (temporary) decrease of CO2 emissions and the quick transfer from face to face to digital meetings, thanks to the existing digital infrastructure.

Education



Over the last year, the PortCityFutures team has had many discussions and produced multidisciplinary research relating to port cities. The rapid and exciting exchange of ideas within this group has so far been represented in blog posts, academic articles and a series of short films. Since the beginning of PCF, the Centre has also aimed for the team to export its generated knowledge into education programs, notably to Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) on challenges in delta regions: one on port cities and one on water awareness.

The production of the first MOOC on port cities is at full steam. It will be published on the EdX platform at the end of May; [enroll here](#). It addresses issues of culture in port cities, and teaches the learners – both university students and professionals in the field – about stakeholder networks, present day challenges, and value-based tools on how to deal with these challenges. The MOOC on water awareness expands on the first one and further explores the role heritage and culture plays in the sustainable development of delta regions. It is expected to go online in September 2021.



Sarah Sannen

Rotterdam is a major port city of The Netherlands, with a colourful history of trade, war and immigration. As the port of Rotterdam, the biggest port in Europe, has largely moved out of the city, the City of Rotterdam aims to compensate for this with festivals, museums and other events to engage and strengthen the maritime mindset. This institutionalised and heavily funded approach is centred on securing Rotterdam's reputation as a globally leading port city. There is more than a top-down intervention to construct a maritime mindset. Smaller communities near the port itself have their own. They are further from the main hub of activity and political centre, have less centralised funding and are not a priority in the City's strategy. But that wouldn't tell the whole story.

As part of my Masters' thesis at Leiden University and in collaboration with the PortCityFutures research group, I have engaged with the communities of Rozenburg and Pernis to explore visions of the future. These two villages, nestled in the middle of the port of Rotterdam, are deeply engaged with the port. Pernis, situated between an oil refinery and container docks, doesn't primarily have a working relationship with the port.

Future



We are looking forward to another year of research, education and events!

Regards,
The PortCityFutures Team