

Mediterranean Port Cities: Shared Heritage, Shared Challenges for Urban Sustainability



*An online symposium organized in the framework of the 2024 NIT Urban Heritage Lab
Historic Ports, Future Cities. Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Urban Development*

11 October 2024 | 09.30 - 16.00



NIT URBAN HERITAGE LAB 2024

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The symposium is organized by

Aysel Arslan (NIT), Bilge Bektaş (The Historical Port City of Izmir Site Management Office),
Alvise Cecchetti (NIT/VU), Fokke Gerritsen (NIT), Gülşah Günata (NIT), Özgün Özçakır (METU),
Charlie Smid (VU), Ahu Sönmez (The Historical Port City of Izmir Site Management Office)



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Mediterranean Port Cities: Shared Heritage, Shared Challenges for Urban Sustainability

It has frequently been recognized that port cities around the Eastern Mediterranean, such as Smyrna, Salonica, Alexandria or Venice, have long and intertwined histories. Centuries of maritime trade and the exchanges of people, culture and ideas that came with it, gave port cities and their populations a character that merged aspects from their regional or national settings with aspects shared with other port cities across the sea. The labels ‘cosmopolitan’ and ‘multi-cultural’ are often applied to describe this character, while harbor installations and trade infrastructure have also contributed to the spatial and visual ‘port city’ character of these historical cities.

Port cities around the Mediterranean and elsewhere are currently faced with major spatial, environmental, economic and demographic challenges. How are these challenges affecting their historical port areas? What transformations are taking place and what conservation, planning and design strategies are employed to integrate the unique port city heritage into these transformation processes?

This symposium looks at Eastern Mediterranean port cities, their historical developments and urban characteristics, with a focus on port city heritage as a way to explore and strengthen connections between past, present and future.

SYMPOSIUM PROGRAM

09.30 – 10.00 | OPENING SPEECHES

Fokke Gerritsen, *Netherlands Institute in Turkey (NIT)*

Özgün Özçakır, *Graduate Program in Conservation of Cultural Heritage - Middle East Technical University (METU)*

Charlie Smid, *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*

Merve Çalışkan, *İzmir Metropolitan Municipality*

Bilge Bektaş, Ahu Sönmez, *The Historical Port City of Izmir Site Management Office*

TBC, *Konak Municipality*

Sergenç İneler, *TARKEM*

10.00 – 12.30 | SESSION I

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE OTTOMAN WORLD AND BEYOND

Architecture of Humble Landings: Early Modern Port Structures of Istanbul and the Ottoman World

Namık Günay Erkal (TED University)

Non-material heritage of a Mediterranean port city: The case of fin-de-siècle Thessaloniki

Didem Yerli (Leiden University)

11.00 – 11.30 | Coffee Break

Tracing the Dutch in the Ottoman Port City İzmir

Çağla Caner Yüksel (Başkent University, University of Amsterdam)

Logistic infrastructures in the Golfo and the 17th-century debate on commercial regulations

Vera Costantini (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

12.30 – 13.30 | Lunch Break

13.30 – 16.00 | SESSION II

LINKING PAST AND PRESENT: REGENERATION, REVITALIZATION IN A CHANGING WORLD

Portraits of Port Cities: Waterfront Regeneration Projects and Contemporary Design Approaches

Fatma Tanış (TU Delft)

Echoes of the Mediterranean: A Call for Revitalization

Husam Husain (German University in Cairo)

14.30 – 15.00 | Coffee Break

The Effects of Coastal Developments and Climate Change in Rize, Türkiye

Gül Aktürk Hauser (Leiden University)

What Makes the Historic Kemeraltı Bazaar a Living Heritage Site?

Ayşegül Altınörs Çırak (Dokuz Eylül University)

Architecture of Humble Landings: Early Modern Port Structures of Istanbul and the Ottoman World

Namık Erkal, TED University

Nineteenth century western travelers had described landings of the Levant's port cities unanimously as chaotic, crowded, dirty and flimsy; lacking order and infrastructure. The complex bureaucratic formalities were realized in naturally-blessed settings without major investment and make shift structures. Many of these Ottoman ports were settled informally on infrastructural remains from the past (mostly from the Hellenistic-Roman periods; some also from the Crusaders, Mamluks and Latins): fortifications, bastions, enclosed ports and their pools, harbor colonnades, grid-iron streets and some masonry warehouses. When in the second half of the nineteenth century, most of the Ottoman port landings would be transformed to become part of the global maritime transportation networks, the motive was revising the Antique harbors' infrastructural scale and their grand architecture. In between these two time-frames and infrastructural significance, the architecture and urbanism of the early modern Ottoman Empire's maritime harbors remains an enigma challenging canonic historical representations.

While some harbors declined within the "waning" Ottoman Mediterranean, some few flourished in different episodes and reached considerable trade capacity; such as İzmir or Rosetta. This economic activity has been represented and mapped by historians. Contradictory to the large amount of economic flows, the large working harbor cities did neither possess large infrastructures nor did the waterfront have a monumental architectural expression. Except for navy arsenals, some masonry khans and bastions, they functioned within humbles structures. How, then, can the architectures of the early modern Ottoman landings be understood and represented? In which spatial terms were terms were the port structures organized? Does the early modern navigation and shipping technologies have a role to play in the configuration of such a waterfront? And what is the relevance of the early modern Ottoman ports' case for the contemporary revitalizations?

The presentation will offer architectures and urban patterns of Istanbul's landings for manifesting the spatiality of the early modern port structures in the Ottoman Empire. The capital city, one of the greatest ports of the empire, is well-documented in primary textual and visually sources, and provides a rare window to the kind of humble and informal places early modern Ottoman ports were. Although the case is based on a unique geographical element, the natural harbor Golden Horn and the Bosphorus and three mutual settlements, it still possesses major characteristics of the Ottoman maritime ports; such as, adaptation to the conditions of the natural shoreline, appropriation of former infrastructures, gradual infill by debris and waterfront buildings, multiplication of custom houses, and the connection of landings with inner-city wholesale markets. These unassuming structures, mostly of timber, however, were persistent in urban form since they were reconstructed over and over again within similar footprints.

Non-material Heritage of a Mediterranean Port City: The Case of Fin-de-siècle Thessaloniki

Didem Yerli, Leiden University

During the 19th century, port cities increasingly became major sites of cultural and social exchange. Local populations influenced one another at a greater pace than ever before. In the last couple of decades, many scholars have argued that 19th century Mediterranean port cities played a significantly important role in the emergence of today's political and economic systems. While developing industries, trade networks, and new means of transport connected local populations, regional peculiarities led to diverse social and political events in each port city. By the end of WWI, most port cities found themselves in political turmoil and faced a new urban lifestyle. This presentation focuses on Thessaloniki, a port city where diverse ethno-religious groups co-existed before WWI. By studying the cosmopolitan practices of 19th century Thessaloniki, this presentation will explore the non-material heritage of the port city and its cosmopolitan practices before WWI.

Tracing the Dutch in the Ottoman Port City İzmir

Çağla Caner Yüksel, Başkent University, University of Amsterdam

The Ottoman port city of İzmir was a modest settlement until the late 16th century. The city gradually became a cosmopolitan port thanks to the rise of European-Ottoman trade relations against the Habsburg monarchies, as capitulations were granted to the French (1569), English (1582) and Dutch (1612). International trade led not only to economic and urban growth, but also to the development of urban life, patterns and space. European consuls and merchants moved to and settled in İzmir. These developments, in turn, attracted more Armenians, Jews and Greeks engaged in trade, in addition to the already established Ottoman Muslim and Greek populations in the city. The rich Ottoman demography, further diversified by the European communities, fostered various forms of interrelationships. The cooperation and competition between these groups influenced the spatial production and transformation of the city. This study focuses on the Dutch among the European communities of İzmir's multicultural and polyglot urban society. It aims to reveal the significance of the Dutch presence and their spatial traces in Ottoman İzmir. In doing so, the study explores how and to what extent the Dutch were involved in the making of space within the entanglement of actors and agents of İzmir's urban history.

Logistic Infrastructures in the Golfo and the 17th-century Debate on Commercial Regulations

Vera Costantini, Ca' Foscari University of Venice

In the aftermath of the Ottoman conquest of Cyprus, the economic structure of the Eastern Mediterranean space witnessed radical changes, including the transformation of the exchange system and, consequently, of the logistic organisation. The enlargement of the volume of trade resulting from the arrival of Northern and Western European companies implied the emergence of new mediators and new port facilities. On the wave of this transformation, the Ancient Italian States were confronted with the perspective of becoming pass-through transit areas, with low-cost or free port facilities. The ruling class of the Republic of Venice, one of the major 16th-century mercantilist and industrial powers, chose not to embrace this policy and developed an alternative strategy whose main achievement became the foundation of the scala di Spalato project. The discussion on free-trade and mercantilism became the centre of a lively philosophical debate that involved intellectuals from different countries, including Venetian consultant Paolo Sarpi, who guided the Republic of Saint Mark's through the hardships of the early-17th-century conflict with the Papal State, whose true stake was the position of the Italian peninsula in the new economic order to be established by the new leading economies of the world.

Portraits of Port Cities: Waterfront Regeneration Projects and Contemporary Design Approaches

Fatma Tanış, TU Delft

Marked on maps not only along bodies of water, but also at the convergence of entangled local and global networks of flows, port cities have always been subject to rapid transformations in relation to changing political, economic, social, and technological developments. As the primary site where overseas trade operates, advancements in shipping technologies have had direct consequences for planning and designing port cities. Ports and port-related functions have been relocated in each era of their histories to enable synchronisation of port activities, serving as the backbone of trade among interconnected port cities.

A series of changes during the 20th century transformed the face of port cities. Among others, deindustrialisation and its subsequent economic and social consequences left parts of port cities derelict. These abandoned areas have been revitalised within the framework of waterfront regeneration projects, bringing together diverse actors—both governmental and non-governmental bodies. The projects offer sites for contemporary architecture while incorporating these areas into cities and urban life.

Though port cities share a common fate, they follow different timelines for developing projects and applications. Each project—together with its process as well as results—offers learnings for future projects. In this respect, this lecture provides a brief history of waterfront regeneration projects since the first examples undertaken in North America. By focusing on different examples executed in the 1960s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, it reflects on evolving development strategies and contemporary design approaches.

Echoes of the Mediterranean: A Call for Revitalization

Husam Husain, German University in Cairo

The presentation explores the evolving identity of Mediterranean cities, drawing on reflections from the urbanization processes along the coastlines and the region at large. It highlights the key challenges faced by these cities, including the loss of historic and cultural elements, as well as the gradual erosion of communal and spatial characteristics that once defined the Mediterranean way of life. The speech calls for a renewed focus on preserving and revitalizing the unique architectural, social, and environmental aspects of these urban spaces. Ultimately, it advocates for a balanced approach to modernization that respects the region's rich legacy while addressing the contemporary needs of its inhabitants.

The Effects of Coastal Developments and Climate Change in Rize, Türkiye

Gül Aktürk Hauser, Leiden University

Climate change is already increasing the frequency and severity of events such as flooding, rainfalls, storms, and landslides in the city of Rize, which has a long history of port and trading activities. Compounding effects from coastal and inland developments over time increased the vulnerability of population causing loss and damage to the infrastructure, buildings, crops, and other resources. This presentation provides a historical and spatial analysis of the developments in the city as a cause to the increasing effects of climate change. It finalizes by discussing the need of an integrated framework for building climate resilience.

What Makes The Historic Kemeraltı Bazaar a Living Heritage Site?

Ayşegül Altınörs Çırak, Dokuz Eylül University

The living heritage approach regards the past as an integral part of the future and defines the conservation process within the framework of continuity, together with its tangible and intangible cultural values. In living heritage places, values from the past maintain their significance in social and spatial memories and identity by relating them to the dynamics of the period, despite changing processes. Kemeraltı is also a living heritage place that has maintained its active life for centuries. It has managed to sustain its use, importance and value in the society within the framework of historic continuity. This presentation focuses on the question of what are the spatial and social characteristics that make the Historic Kemeraltı Bazaar a living heritage site. In this context, the morphological and architectural qualities of the place that support it as a living heritage site will be discussed within the framework of spatial analysis parameters such as scale, spatial enclosure features, walkability parameters, and the characteristics of open and closed public spaces. Then, the effects of the collective memory characteristics of the place and the associated intangible values in the life of the place will be explained. At the end, what needs to be done to maintain these parameters that contribute to the living heritage place will be discussed.