

Port Cities as Areas of Transition – Comparative Ethnographic Research

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Port cities are nodes of international trade, channelling movements of cargo and flows of migration. In recent decades, international port cities have been increasingly affected by global transformation processes. Economic and technological changes have fundamentally restructured ports all over the world, dramatically altering the relation between port and city, the cities' images and representations, and the condition of people living and working around the ports. A five-stage model of the historical course of this development has been presented by Hoyle (1988, 1989, see also Schubert 2001 and in this volume), ranging from “primitive” inner-city ports, increasing industrialisation of port economies, to highly modernised container terminals far removed from the inner cities, with traditional port areas turning into urban wastelands and, eventually, into targets for urban renewal programmes.

Segments of the urban population living close to the ports, or making their living from port activities, have been particularly affected. In the context of global economic and political change, port cities have also become transit points and interfaces of transnational migration. At the same time, in many cities, historical port areas and their environs have become an object of redesigning and restructuring the urban space, and of resulting gentrification.

As Schubert (2001) points out, transformation processes in port cities have so far been mainly studied by urban geographers, economists and urban planners. Consequently, most research has concentrated on long-term development, on the position of ports in national economies, and on the physical results of urban restructuring. In view of rapid

global change and ongoing planning processes in international port cities, this state of research urgently needs to be complemented by in-depth studies of the variety of planning cultures, of goals, norms and values of actors and affected populations, and of their involvement in ever-changing balances of power¹ (Schubert 2001: 34).

Port-city development: historical stages in comparative perspective

Until recently, harbours formed the core of urban development in all port cities. According to Hoyle, port-city development can be divided into five stages. Up to the 19th century, great seaports predominantly served as markets for international staple goods of value. Harbours were integral parts of the city, included in the urban fortification systems. Merchants' houses were located close to the water, combining all the functions of dwelling, storage, trade and business administration.

The second half of the 19th century through to the early 20th century was marked by increased industrialisation and the expansion of city-ports. More space was needed for steamships and steam-driven cranes. The ports turned from sites of trade to nodes of traffic and transport. The city expanded with the port, new port related quarters and workers' neighbourhoods developed rapidly, characterised by high population density, poor dwelling conditions and casual labour.

While the industrialisation process was basically maintained until the mid- 20th century, the face of the ports was changed by technologic developments. Larger ships called for deep-water harbours outside of the old port areas. Modern seaports were developed instead of the old inner-city ports, which frequently turned into touristic museum sites, capitalising on stereotyped port city images. When containers were introduced in the late 1960s, this process increased even further, while former port areas in or close to the inner cities turned into urban wastelands. The last phase of this development is marked by revitalisation programmes affecting the areas surrounding the port, recent examples including London's dockland development project or Hamburg's HafenCity.

The studies in this volume present a variety of cities in Europe and Latin America, exemplifying different stages and problems in the ongoing processes of social and economic transformation. To varying de-

1 "Forschungsdefizite und Fragen nach den jeweiligen Planungskulturen, nach den Zielen und Normen der handelnden Akteure und der Betroffenen und ihr Eingebundensein in veränderliche Machtbalancen drängen sich auf" (Schubert 2001: 34).

grees, all cities involved in this project have recently undergone massive structural transformations, fundamentally changing the relationship of city and port. Local effects of this global process manifest themselves in the decline of port-related sectors of the economy and, in turn, in urban revitalisation programmes. Nonetheless, while most European cases fit quite evenly into the model proposed by Hoyle, other cities show a greater degree of variation. Some examples may illustrate this point:

The port of *Dublin* can be seen as a prototype, representing all stages of city-port development during its history. From a small harbour on the river Liffey within the confines of the city, the city port expanded during the 19th century. With the building of the new Custom House, the port was relocated away from the centre and closer to the sea. During this time, port workers' communities were developed, which, after a period of retreat from the waterfront, recently became targets for dockland development urban renewal projects.

Although economic developments in Bulgaria have been shaped by socialism and post-socialist transformations, *Varna's* port-city development roughly fits into stages four and five of the model. Nonetheless, the inner city port is not being relocated completely to a site away from the city. Recent expansions of the port include the older parts and even foresee an expansion further along the city's waterfront.

As a major seaport, *Hamburg* also represents all stages of city-port development. After industrial production had been relocated between the 1960s and 1980s and container terminals called for increased storage space, port functions were removed to new locations away from the city. Former port areas are now in the process of being transformed into a new business and residential area, the "HafenCity". But Hamburg is a major node of inland waterways as well. In this respect, Hamburg's development differs from the time frame suggested by Hoyle. While Germany was separated, inland waterways were an important route for shipping cargo to West Berlin and the inland waterway port remained close to the inner city. In the 1990s, after Berlin had lost its island status, the inland waterway port was also relocated further away from the city.

In contrast to the European examples, distinct stages of development can be identified in *Montevideo*, but they occur in a different temporal order. These differences are mainly due to different historical developments in Europe and Latin America. Parallels do exist chiefly in the context of technological change and effects of globalisation. The first phase of "primitive" inner city port ranges from the city's foundation in 1724 until the end of the 19th century, including various historical periods from colonialism to mass immigration from Europe. The second half of the 19th century was characterised by great demographic and

economic transformations, resulting in an expansion of the city port at the turn of the century and initiating the stage of expanding city port according to Hoyle's model. For Montevideo, the second stage blends into the third. Different from Europe, in Uruguay the 1950s mark a major economic crisis, slowing down industrial growth. Investments were stopped and Montevideo's Ciudad Vieja fell into decay. Also different from the European example, there has not been a significant retreat from the waterfront, marking the fourth stage in the model. The location of the port has not been changed; it still remains close to the city. Consequently, there are only few projects relating to revitalisation of the waterfronts or of port related quarters. Nonetheless, there has been a slow process of urban renewal since the 1990s.

Images, representations and “planning cultures”: the port, the coastline and the sea

While cities in general have been defined in terms of size, density and heterogeneity (Wirth 1938), as well as sites of rapid social change, port cities in particular seem to epitomise these features. Consequently, port cities have triggered a wide range of imaginations and projections, blending fantasies of freedom and faraway places with images of danger and moral decay. As Schubert (in this volume) points out, literary and cinematic depictions of port cities have become a genre in its own right, founded in the early 20th century by writers like Erasmus Fischer (1927), a travel journalist and (self-styled) “ex-mariner” who evoked “[...] das Hafenenleben und sein sittliches Niveau, sein Treiben und Blühen, seine Laster und seine Geheimnisse [...]. Das gesteigerte, zügellose, in seinen Begierden rasende Leben der Hafenstädte erfordert eine ungeschminkte Darstellung, die nicht von falscher Prüderie durchsetzt ist [...]”², for an audience both shocked and fascinated by the dark and devious side of the ports.

On a more serious level, stereotypes and imaginations relating to the port, the sea and to international waterways and migration, are still an important topic in the process of urban transformation affecting port cities. Consciously or unconsciously, these images inform the goals and values underlying urban planning and decisions relating to the built environment.

2 “The morals of port life, thriving and blossoming vices and secrets [...] the feverish, unbridled, crazed and craving life in port cities asking for an uncensored report, unhampered by false prudishness [...].” (Fischer 1927: 13) (Translation: Waltraud Kokot)

Of all cases presented in this volume, *Hamburg* most explicitly capitalises on its maritime image, although the active port area is off limits to most inhabitants and the river Elbe is a barrier not only to physical mobility. In mental representations of the city, the river also tends to act as a sharp divide of local identities. Nonetheless, Hamburg presents itself as a maritime port city, first and foremost. At the core of this representation is the former inner city port with adjoining quarters and storehouses, which are now being transformed into recreational areas. The building sites of the new “HafenCity” are incorporated into maritime tourist attractions. Media events like the yearly (rather fictitious) “Port Birthday” or public celebrations of the arrival of major vessels like the “Queen Mary” underline the economic and symbolic significance of the port.

In contrast, *Dublin’s* relationship to the port is not easy to grasp. Distinctive differences exist between Dublin as a city, the dockland area and some port-related communities. Much different from Hamburg, the Dublin port area has up to now not been utilised as a tourist attraction, and in the general view of Dublin’s inhabitants the port is virtually non-existent, despite its economic importance. Before the regeneration of the docklands, this area did not figure in most Dubliners’ mental maps either. If it was mentioned at all, it was mainly stereotyped as a dangerous, high-crime, no-go area. Presently, in the course of urban renewal projects, the image of the dockland area is slowly changing. The docklands have gained a new presence in the public view, but they are being presented to visitors and tourists as examples of new architecture rather than as a port area. While the port still does not figure predominantly, the presence of water has become an asset enhancing the docklands’ qualities as a residential area. In contrast, the port was always of prime importance to the surrounding communities and neighbourhoods as a major supplier of work. Even though port-related labour has virtually disappeared from these communities, this close relationship is still re-enacted by community festivals and port-community initiatives. All dockland communities keep a close relationship to their history and traditions, emphasising a working class-identity relating to the industrial port, the docks and the river. The sea as such, or any maritime imagery, does not figure strongly in every day life, or as symbols of identity formation.

Although a major port city, *Varna* presents itself explicitly as Bulgaria’s “Capital of the Sea”, while the port itself does not figure prominently in the city’s public representation. Varna’s central location relating to the sea is not the port, but the “Sea Garden”, a large park stretching out from the inner city along the coastline, offering various

recreational facilities to inhabitants and tourists. The beaches along the Sea Garden connect the city to the ocean, circumventing the port areas, which are still considered as dangerous and undesirable.

A parallel situation can be observed in *Thessaloniki*. Even though parts of the port area have been opened to the public and former warehouses were turned into shops and museums, public acceptance of these areas remains relatively low. While the recently rebuilt and gentrified Ladadika quarter close to the port has turned into a popular recreational area, its port and maritime functions have disappeared completely and do not figure at all in the public representation. Similar to Varna, Thessaloniki presents itself as the “Bride of the Sea”, but again it is the coastline, not the port, that forms the core of this imagery.

This also applies to a certain degree to the case of *Istanbul*. Historically, the city has grown along the waterfronts, and water remains a central point of reference and of orientation. The vistas onto the water, and the urban silhouette seen from the water, are major elements of image-making and of identification for its inhabitants. Nonetheless, Istanbul presents itself not primarily as a port city, but as a city on the sea shores, surrounded by water.

Also in *Montevideo*, the city and the sea are closely related, although again, the port itself only plays a minor role in the city’s representation. Montevideo was founded on the peninsula that now is the Ciudad Vieja, close to the mouth of the Rio de la Plata. Montevideo has more than 20 km of coastline, and the road along the coast, the *rambla* is a central point of reference for its inhabitants, serving both as thoroughfare and as a place of recreation. The beaches also are important leisure areas, attracting all strata of Montevideo’s society. In the Ciudad Vieja there are no beaches and access to the waterfront is limited, because the coastline is blocked by the expanding port. Nonetheless, vistas onto the sea are considered as major assets of Ciudad Vieja. Many houses have terraced roofs, and streets offering a view to the sea are protected in the city’s ground plan. While there is no explicit reference to Montevideo as port city similar to Hamburg, maritime images do appear in representations of the city, mainly in the visual arts.

Revitalisation and gentrification in port cities

In a recent volume on urban ethnicity, Erdentug and Colombijn (2002) refer to a globally interconnected network of major cities as nodes of “cultural flows”, standing in marked contrast to peripheral zones, which are bypassed by relevant economic, social and cultural level develop-

ments. Major port cities are exemplary nodal points in the complex system of international labour and trade (Läpple 1994: 462) at the crossroads of main transport routes (Schubert 2001: 16). As global cities in general, they are highly competitive to each other (Sassen 2001). In order to improve their position in the global network, municipal governments have been creating infrastructures and policies encouraging investment and the establishment of new business enterprises, the professionalisation of labour and high-end recreation and consumption, to reorient the cities to the real and imagined interests of globally mobile investors (Sassen 1994, 2001; Loftman/Nevin 2003).

“The role of urban planning in the context of competitive city strategies is to facilitate the redevelopment of the built environment and engage in place marketing in order to ameliorate conditions for such interurban competition.” (Cowan/Bunce 2006: 429)

The redevelopment of urban waterfronts in cities with declining traditional industries is one major aspect of the agenda of the competitive city, and has been a hallmark of urban revitalisation strategies since the 1980s (Hoyle 1988, 1989; Schubert 2001 and in this volume). The privileged location of urban waterfronts, their centrality close to downtown financial and commercial districts, and their capacity for leisure-, residential- and commercial development, make them an attractive focus for urban renewal projects. The waterfront provides the developers with space where space is scarce – close to the city centres.

“The redevelopment of urban waterfronts into gentrified residential and commercial areas produces new spaces for investment and accumulation and provides symbolic visuals for entrepreneurial ‘city branding’ campaigns.” (Cowan/Bunce 2006: 429)

The concept of gentrification refers to specific processes of urban restructuring, affecting urban areas that once were considered desirable, but have fallen into dereliction. Their investment potential lies either in their specific location (e.g. close to the city centres or to the waterfront), or in historically interesting buildings, which may at least partially be renovated and put to new uses in the process. Frequently, the actual gentrification process is preceded by “pioneers” (students, artists, etc.), who move into the area attracted by low rents and unusual locations. In turn, the new lifestyles and cultural activities developed by the pioneers attract the influx of actual “gentrifiers”: middle-class residents who are able to invest into the renovation of dilapidated buildings, or who have

sufficient means to rent or buy accommodations renovated by professional investors.

These projects may serve to keep the city competitive in different aspects, but they frequently lead to social exclusion. Due to the restoration of buildings and the ensuing raises in rents, or the transformation of rented space to tenant-ownership, former residents may be forced to leave the gentrified areas. Thus, the concept of gentrification is closely related to process of urban segregation. Various theoretical approaches have been offered to explain the development of gentrification. Hamnett (1991), Lees (2000) and Slater (2004) suggest a synthesis, offering a multi-dimensional model including economic factors like rent gaps (Smith 1979), as well as consumer preferences of the new middle classes (Ley 1986, 1996).

In this volume, most case studies explicitly refer to urban transformation processes that might be labelled “gentrification”, but some of these cases do not fit entirely with the common use of the term. In the case of Montevideo’s Ciudad Vieja, the influence of residents’ movements and local decision-makers has been strong enough so far to prevent actual gentrification, while in the case of Varna, urban revitalisation follows entirely different preferences: not the inner-city areas close to the port are considered as desirable, but a park close to the sea coast is now in danger of becoming a building site.

In the revitalisation of former inner-city port areas, the aspect of social exclusion may seem less prominent because in most cases they were not used as residential areas before (e.g. Hamburg’s HafenCity, or Thessaloniki’s port area and Ladadika quarter). Nonetheless, as these examples show, social exclusion is not only limited to the displacement of former inhabitants, but can also affect the working and living conditions of former port-related professions or marginalised groups like migrants. In the inner-city ports, work functions are being replaced by residential functions, and the new residents may not relate at all to the history and imagery of the port workers. The case of Dublin however, demonstrates open clashes between the symbolic representations of former port workers and the life style of new residents.

Migration, diaspora and urban space

Port cities have also always been nodes of migration, concentrating ideas, economic and material goods, migration and exile. Connected to world wide networks, port cities have been points of arrival and of departure for numbers of migrants, many of them remaining as expatriate

communities of traders or merchants, who in turn fostered the cities' development by their transnational connections and left their mark on the urban space. Even today, many of the centres of old diasporas are still attracting new communities – be it networks of business or scientific elites, or immigrants and refugees turning into diasporas in the second or third generation.

Since the beginnings of urban ethnography in the 1920s Chicago School, ethnicity and ethnic diversity in cities have been a major research interest, underlining the significance of the urban context for interethnic relations and cultural exchange:

„Hence, inter-ethnic relations are more likely to develop in cities than in villages, because the diversity of services and opportunities offered by cities attracts a larger variety of people than a village economy.” (Erdentug/Colombijn 2002: 1)

Research paradigms developed in the Chicago School emphasised ethnic enclaves and the competition about urban territory among migrant groups. Segregation and mutual exclusion were treated as the dominant patterns of urban ethnicity.

Globalisation and transnational migration have introduced a change of focus in the study of urban space. “Global cities” have been analysed as central nodes of global networks, in which, according to Manuel Castells (1996), different “flows” come together, creating a “space of flows”, in contrast to a “space of places”, which are bypassed by global networks and development. This increasing polarisation characterises not only the relation between cities. Massive social and economic transformations also leave their mark on the physical shape of the built urban environment; gentrification processes create new forms of segregation and ethnic exclusion. These processes shed a new light on the development of ethnic urban space.

More research on the specific interrelations between migration and urban space is needed, exploring the interdependence between the development of migrant and diaspora communities, and transformations of urban space. Actors' choices can be enabled or constrained by the space they live or work in, while different groups use space in culture-specific ways, thus actively shaping the urban environment. Diasporas differ from the ethnic enclaves described in the older literature by their ongoing relations to home countries and to a global network of communities. In some periods, ethnic enclavement and spatial segregation were either directly forced on diasporas, or they were an option because they offered at least some measure of protection (e.g. Calimani 1990; Cesarani 2002).

As the case of Thessaloniki shows, differentiation and even segregation of space in multiethnic cities may be utilised in the process of image-building – but only to a certain degree. Thessaloniki presents itself to a European audience as a cosmopolitan city with a rich multicultural history, while present-day new immigrants surviving as street vendors are subject to social exclusion, but also make use of this image in their specific marketing strategies. Trade is also a major activity of migrants both in *Algéciras* and in *Belém*, where they leave their mark on the urban space particularly in the central market areas close to the ports.

Ethnography: studying local effects of global transformation

The contributions to this volume are based on ethnographic field work in eight port cities in Europe and Latin America, representing different stages of port-city development. Following Schubert's suggestion, these case studies attempt to contribute an ethnographic approach, focusing on the relevance of urban imagery in planning processes, on local effects of urban transformation and gentrification, and on local actors' viewpoints in port-related ethnic and working class neighbourhoods.

The ethnographic³ research perspective is characterised by a close-up focus on local actors' ways of life, on their specific cultural knowledge, and on their everyday activities. The distinctive feature of ethnographic field work⁴ as compared to other social science approaches is the researchers' close and long-term personal contact with the actors under study, enabling intensive participant observation of their everyday lives. Focusing on local cultures, in the sense of individuals' views, knowledge and strategies of action, the ethnographic perspective provides a unique approach to investigate local effects of global structures

3 There is considerable terminological confusion relating to ethnographic research. Ethnology, or social/cultural anthropology (in Germany: "Ethnologie") is the comparative study of culturally determined varieties of human behaviour and of social organisation. Different from other usages, the German term "Ethnologie" does not imply a distinction between social and cultural topics of research. The term "ethnography" generally refers to the process of data collection in the field, as well as to the resulting descriptions. In this paper I use the term "ethnography" when referring to the research process, while "ethnology" refers to the academic field.

4 Methods of ethnographic field research include participant and non-participant observation, various techniques of interviewing, social network analysis and a range of specific elicitation techniques directed at cognitive, economic and socio-demographic data.

and transformations. Providing an insiders' point of view, it can serve as a much-needed empirical corrective to more abstract, macro-level theories of globalisation. By nature of this local perspective, ethnographic research to a large extent has been descriptive and caseorientated. Nonetheless, theories on the variability of human culture and social organisation are formulated and tested on the basis of systematic cross-cultural comparisons.

Ethnographic studies provide micro-level perspectives on the effects of global transformation processes, as well as systematic insights into perceptions and strategies of local actors. Although historically, ethnology has been associated with the study of small-scale societies, recently ethnographic methods have been applied to various aspects of complex societies as well. In the past decades, urban and migration studies have become fields of major relevance for ethnological research.⁵ Nonetheless, urban ethnographers are confronting specific methodological challenges. Only in rare cases, contemporary urban fields still consist of clearly demarcated spatial sites. More often, the fields studied by urban anthropologists consist of social networks spreading across various parts of the city, extending beyond its spatial limits, or even – as in the case of migrant communities – transcending the boundaries of nation-states as well.

The case studies: sites and topics of research

Since 2001, a team of urban ethnologists at the University of Hamburg has been studying local effects of global transformation in European⁶ and Latin American port cities. Historically, European port cities were sites where cargo was predominantly imported, and emigrants departed to overseas destinations. In Latin American port cities, these tendencies were partially reversed: goods were exported to Europe, while the ports served as points of entry for immigrants. As the choice of field sites was mainly based on pragmatic criteria such as access and previous research experience, the focus of these studies varies according to differing na-

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- 5 For recent ethnographic studies of social exclusion and urban poverty see e.g. Desjarlais 1997; Ferrell/Hamm 1998; Gigengack/van Gelder 2000.
 - 6 Part of this research was conducted within the framework of a joint European project under the EU "Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion". This cooperation was mainly directed at strategies of subsistence and social organisation of local actors affected by social exclusion, resulting in policy-orientated reports (Kokot 2006a and 2006b).

tional and local conditions, representing different stages in the relationship of city and port.

Nonetheless, all studies share a common set of basic assumptions and general questions of research. Taking the five-stage model of city-port development (Hoyle 1988, 1989) as a common point of departure for all projects, research topics and questions were jointly developed (and constantly adjusted during the research process), in order to provide a common theoretical framework and to ensure at least a modest level of comparability. All studies are based on ethnographic fieldwork, either in neighbourhoods and communities (once) related to the ports, or, as in the case of Varna, Montevideo and Istanbul, also among architects, artists and decision makers actively involved in urban renewal.

The papers in this volume represent the challenges of a wide variety of urban fields, ranging from traditional dockland communities with a long history of local identity and strong attachment to place, over inland waterway sailors whose work and everyday routine is affected by port and waterfront revitalisation programmes, to active agents of gentrification such as international urban planners designing new concepts for port and dockland areas. Other studies focus on new types of international migration and exile, which are closely related to the role of port cities as centres of nodes of human traffic and centres of diaspora formation.

A central focus of these projects is on the situation and social practice of local actors directly affected by change in port areas. In most cases, these changes are related to gentrification processes in the course of urban renewal projects. Most communities close to the inner city ports had already lost their economic connections to port and docks, long before the onset of this process. Nonetheless, in many cases the port-related history of these neighbourhoods still acts as an important factor in shaping local identities, while often migrant and diaspora communities have also concentrated in these areas, setting a distinctive mark on the urban space. Consequently, a second focus of research is on port city images, both referring to local identity formation by their inhabitations, and to deliberate processes of image-building in the course of urban planning and renewal policies.

Analysing urban transformation processes in the *Dublin* docklands, Astrid Wonneberger focuses on the impact of physical changes of urban places and spaces on the structure and every-day practice of dockland communities. New boundaries – on an administrative as well as on a physical level – create new forms of social exclusion. Also, many residents perceive the demolition of old buildings and the rise of new architectural design as a threat to community structure and identity. The

analysis of the micro-level demonstrates the interrelations of the physical urban environment, the social structure of dockland communities, and the formation of local identities and culture.

Mijal Gandelsman-Trier gives an insight into characteristic features of structural change in Ciudad Vieja of *Montevideo*, the historical centre and port-related district of the city, focusing on consequences of global transformations on the local level and emphasising the specific perspective of the city of Montevideo. Although structural changes can also be related to global aspects of transformation, processes of change in Montevideo's Ciudad Vieja do not correspond to only one form of transition. Ciudad Vieja is a heterogeneous and multi-faceted district: historical city centre and residential area; representative location for public and private institutions, as well as a living quarter for poorer segments of the population; tourist attraction and dockland area. She analyses urban transformations in Ciudad Vieja, stressing simultaneous development as well as contradictions. Transformation takes place within the scope of urban planning programmes, aimed at decentralisation and participation on the local level and initiating a variety of different discourses and practices. This paper explores current processes of change, local actors' practices and strategies, as well as implications of the port-city-interface.

The port of *Hamburg* is a central node connecting worldwide trade routes with the European hinterland. Most cargo is distributed in this network by inland waterway ships. Sailors working on these ships have been active users of the port, introducing a unique perspective to Hamburg's port and city from the waterside. Their economic strategies as well as their daily routines are immediately affected by the current transformation of Hamburg's port to container service, moving further away from the city, as well as by the waterfront revitalisation project "Hafen-City". In his article, Reimer Dohrn analyses these effects on local and personal levels, presenting the inland waterway sailors as an example for groups without a strong lobby, who are in danger to be forgotten in the process of developing a new waterfront image.

Algeciras is located on the crossroads of one of the busiest international sea-lanes on the Strait of Gibraltar. During the last 50 years, Algeciras has become the leading Spanish port, surpassing all other Spanish port cities, and forming a bridge between Europe and Northern Africa. This is reflected in the passenger and vehicle traffic on the ships that work the Straits. Each year, more than four million people and over one million vehicles make the crossing, for the most part during summer time. In her fieldwork, Carolin Alfonso concentrates on the effects of the rapid transformation in a city coined by an omnipresent air of transience.

Taking the central market place close to the port as an ethnographic point of departure, she focuses on local actors' strategies of coping with cultural diversity in a relatively small port city.

The geopolitical importance of *Belém* (Brazil) lies above all in its function as "Gate of Amazonia". On one hand, Belém gives access to the most extensive river system on earth and thus to the riches of the Amazonian rain forest, which are transported via the rivers to the international port of Belém and then exported abroad. On the other hand, for the native population the river Guamá and its many, partly informal, port facilities are vital destinations of transition from the interior to the city and offer the only possibilities of access to markets and means of information and communication. In their article, Rosemarie and Dirk Oesemann investigate economical, social and cultural movements around the port, in the context of the various phases of historical development. They also focus on processes of change and their effects on the local population. These processes mirror the development of a society divided socially and separated geographically in the different districts of the port area.

The port city of *Thessaloniki* has a long tradition as a node of migration and trade. Situated at the crossroads between Europe and Asia and connecting the European Union with the former Eastern Block and the Orient, the city has always played a major role in networks of trade and migration. In her article, Salinia Stroux shows how local policy and public discourse have shaped the image construction of Thessaloniki as a multicultural European port city and how this is manifested in public space. On the other side, the same imagery is implicitly used by irregular migrant street vendors in a very pragmatic way for their daily survival. Thus, divergent interpretations of the city image lead to conflicts about public space. In the context of global, national and local transformation processes, the street markets of Thessaloniki have become a conflict zone, a crossroads where competing interests come to the fore.

"Image building" is an important part of waterfront revitalisation. *Varna*, Bulgaria's most important port situated at the shores of the Black Sea and at the banks of the Varna Lake, has been labelled the "Capital of the Sea". So far, neither the port nor the lake figures in this image. In Varna as elsewhere, waterfront revitalisation is not a one-directional process automatically following the retreating ports. It is also the outcome of debates and competing models among urban decision makers, whose plans and projects are to a great degree motivated by public images. Anke Bothfeld analyses the discourse and images of planners and decision-makers, and the resulting transformations of Varna's waterfront, in relation to local, regional and global developments.

Since the early 20th century, industrialisation and modernisation have influenced the development of *Istanbul's* historic waterfront. At the beginning of the 21st century, urban development projects have been proposed for former port areas of the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus. Istanbul Modern, a recently opened museum of modern art located in a former warehouse on the waterfront, is part of the ambitious Galata Port Project, which has been the topic of architectural contests and public debates, which are part of an ongoing discussion about public space and “cultural industries” as impulse for urban renewal. Focusing on the museum and on the Galata Port Project, Kathrin Wildner explores the significance and images of the waterfront, in the context of urban transformation in Istanbul.

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