

Varna, Capital of the Sea: History, Image, and Waterfront Development

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Varna is situated in northern Bulgaria at the shores of the Black Sea and the Varna Lake. Its port is the biggest in Bulgaria, consisting of the ports of Varna-West at the banks of the Varna-Lake and Varna-East in and around the city centre. The outmoded facilities of Varna-East seem to confirm the model of city-port development presented by Hoyle (1989, see also Schubert in this volume), but they still handle one third of the transshipment of the harbour. A new container terminal will be built quite close to the inner city, thus Varna differs slightly from the model¹, which pictures inner city renewal in port cities as a consequence of global technological development, concerning wastelands which are left behind by prospering harbours. While in Varna the inner city is also undergoing rapid transformations, turning from decay to renewal, this development is connected to an image of “centrality”², for which the nearby port and the lake are of no relevance, as they seem to provoke

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- 1 Deviations from Hoyle’s (1989) model could possibly be explained with historical delay, but port development is more complicated and depends on local and international relationships between ports, as well as on technological development. The relationship between the city and the port is another important factor. In Varna, the port underlies not city administration, but state authority. This results in severe restrictions to inner city development by port functions (on Montevideo compare Zillmann 2002; Gandelsman-Trier, this volume). Kokot, this volume, stresses differences between European and Latin American port cities. The development of the port is very likely also related to the history of the city – whether it is more a colonial or a mercantile, maybe more a regal city or a city-state (on this typology compare Fox 1977).
 - 2 “Image” in this context is used in the meaning of “label” or “brand” and thus deals with the marketability of the quarter.

mainly negative associations. Above all, Varna is not so much known as a port city, but as the centre of the northern seaside resorts and often referred to as “*morskata stolitsa*” (Capital of the Sea). While the developments in the centre are not publicly debated, the use of space in a popular public park stretching along the beach, the “*morskata gradina*” (Sea Garden), is contested and vividly discussed.

This article deals with water-related images in the context of waterfront development in Varna. Geographer Jacques Charlier describes the relationship between port and city as struggle in which, at least in western Europe, urban key decision makers are suffering from what he calls “dockland syndrome”. Following the example of the London Docklands, the potential of inner city ports for modernisation is frequently overlooked, and they are readily abandoned in favour of gentrification (Charlier 1992: 137, 140-142). Thus, the image of the de-industrialised city emerges as an important driving force, accompanying or even overruling the force of technological development, in turn employing water-related images to advertise the inner city districts (on the use of “water” in image-building of cities: Tölle 2005, Wildner in this volume).

In Varna, however, although the development of the city’s waterfront differs from Hoyle’s model, water-related images do play an important role.

Interrelationships between water, marketable images and local differences become especially visible in the context of a twin-town partnership project which links the cities of Hamburg (district Eimsbüttel) and Varna. The beginning of my research project coincided with the establishment of a group of city planners from Hamburg in the framework of the town partnership. They visited Varna several times since November 2005 to organise a redevelopment project in Varna. This cooperation offers unique possibilities to introduce elements for ethnography and comparison³, as Hamburg seems a prototypical case for Hoyle’s model (compare Schubert and Dohrn in this volume, and Schubert 2002c on differences).

Hamburg and its port developed as a typical mercantile city (compare the typology of Fox 1977: 92-95) and maintained relative independence of state authority until the late 19th century. In the face of the withdrawal of port functions, the northern bank of the Elbe now is constructed as a “pearl necklace” (“Perlenkette”) of architecture. Its eastern end consists of the “HafenCity”, a developing residential and business district, following the example of the London Docklands (Schubert

3 See Nader’s “comparative consciousness” (1993) and Marcus’ “multi sited ethnography” (2005).

2002c: 151 and in this volume). The project integrates spaces of the old port and the old warehouse district, with a growing heritage industry marketing Hamburg's image as a port city (compare Turnbridge/Ashworth 1992).⁴ These transitions are accompanied with gentrification processes. The old, (in)famous sailortown of St. Pauli has been the target of gentrification since the late eighties, and in the last years the north eastern rim of the port was also discovered for redevelopments.

In the following article, I shall highlight developments in Varna against the perspective of the Hamburg experts, who show a vivid interest in the waterfront of Varna. A Hamburg tourism expert even offered plans to export an important Hamburg festival, the "Hafengeburtstag"⁵, to Varna. In the course of my research, I took part in official and less formal meetings of experts from Hamburg and Varna experts in 2005 and 2006, in Varna and Hamburg. My analysis is based on these observations, on interviews and conversations with experts and with inhabitants of Varna, as well as on many walks through the inner city and discussions in the biggest local daily newspaper, the "*Cherno More*" ("Black Sea")⁶. This article analyses waterfront development in Varna as the result of local history and culture as well of global developments and transnational discussions.

Odessos/Varna: The historical development of Bulgaria's biggest port

Varna was founded as the Greek colony Odessos in 517 B.C. In the second century it was integrated in the Roman Empire, heading a regional network of five towns and ports. During the First Bulgarian Empire, the name Odessos was changed to Varna (Zheleva-Martins 2002: 76f.). After a short Byzantine period and the split of the Second Bulgarian Empire, Varna became the second biggest city of the north eastern part.⁷ By

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- 4 I myself worked in the realm of this heritage industry as a shop assistant in the Speicherstadtmuseum, where I found the possibility to discuss some of these ideas. Especially engaged was my friend and colleague Stefan Rose whom we now miss severely since he passed on in April 2007 at the age of thirty three.
 - 5 Birthday of the port; celebrated as a big tourist attraction every year in Hamburg; compare Kokot in this volume.
 - 6 I used mainly the internet edition, see www.chernomore.bg. [23/02/2008]. The archive where I found articles from before 2005, however, was closed in December 2006.
 - 7 For an interesting overview about the history of Varna, see <http://varna.info.bg>, [23/02/2008]. Currently, only the bulgarian Version works.

trading with Genoa, Varna developed into a wealthy mercantile city, until it was incorporated in the emerging Ottoman Empire in 1393. Trade declined and grew again slowly since the middle of the 17th century. In 1839, the Ottoman Empire permitted trade with Western Europe. Varna was integrated in the European railway network. With the growing traffic of trading vessels, and due to the interests of mainly English trading companies, two quays were built in the bay. After Bulgaria had gained independence, the Bulgarian ports remained under state administration. In Varna, a channel was constructed to connect the Varna Lake to the sea, where port facilities were built. The quality of the work changed essentially, since boats were no longer needed to ship the goods to and from the vessels (Stojanov 1992: 65f, 10).

After the First World War, the Dobrudcha, in the north-east of Bulgaria, fell to Romania, the Russian Empire collapsed, and the port of Varna lost its hinterland and the Russian traffic. Burgas in the South became the most important Bulgarian port (Stojanov 2003: 47). After the Second World War, in spite of restrictions on residence issued in 1955, Varna grew from 110,000 to 260,000 inhabitants between 1945 und 1975 (Koleva 2005: 121). This growth was the most significant in Bulgaria and corresponded to a general trend in Eastern Europe, where under communism port cities grew particularly fast (Hamilton 1980: 170, 180f.). The trend holds until now: 320,000 inhabitants, reaching 500,000 with the seasonal workers in summer, make Varna the third biggest city of Bulgaria (Spored danni ... 2006).

In 1966 a passenger terminal was built on the pier which separates the port facilities from the beach (compare Fig. 1, point 3).⁸

In the 1970s, because of tensions between the USSR and Romania a ferryboat terminal was built at the western shore of the Varna Lake, almost 30 km away from the sea, mainly for traffic to Odessa. The importance of the port of Varna grew again, but the inner city quays of Varna-East were never modernised. Containerisation was not widespread in the Soviet port system (Hall 1992: 106f.), although this was not only a socialist/Eastern European phenomenon: Also the ports in the Mediterranean were less involved in the global development of containerisation (Riley/Shurmer-Smith 1992: 82).

⁸ For port development in Varna see <http://www.port-varna.bg>, [23/02/2008].

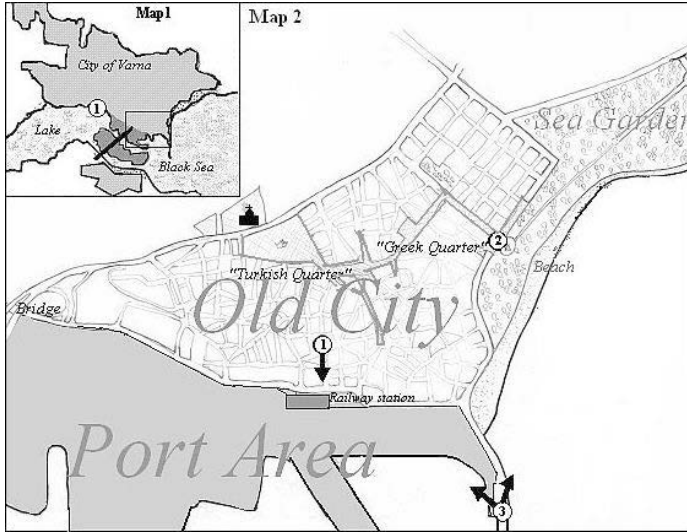


Fig. 1: Varna (maps: Anke Bothfeld)

In Varna, traffic peaked in 1989, but in the 1990s, once again, the collapse of the political system in the east left the port in trouble. Only in 2005, traffic reached again the volume of 1989. In neighbouring Constanța (Romania) new port facilities were developed after the Danube channel was completed in 1984 (Hall 1992: 108). Since 1996, they are being modernised for container traffic. A hub-and-spokes-system evolves: Big container shipping companies call mainly at Constanța which guarantees fast loading and unloading and thus figures as a “hub”, while Varna is almost only served by feeder lines, whose smaller ships are linking the hub with the peripheral ports (Hayuth/Hilling 1992: 48). Varna shipping companies already close their offices and reopen them in Constanța (Marashlieva 2006). Varna’s port is also again in danger of losing its position to Burgas because of a new pipeline for Caucasian oil. But Varna’s roro-facilities are still an important part of the shipping routes in the Black Sea (Tokman 2006: 3). Also, the shipyards are described as a booming industry (Zaradi aktsite ... 2006; Ganeva 2006).

As the case of Varna illustrates, containerisation means a hierarchy of ports by a hub-and-spokes-system, and global technological development does not only mean containerisation, but also specialisation (Hayuth/Hilling 1992: 45-48).

But historical and local factors, as well as regional and national politics, are likely to determine the development of a port at least as much as global technological developments. The Bulgarian ports are

administered by the state. This makes the planning for the city of Varna even more difficult. The city and the ministry of transport both are looking forward to the closing of most of the outmoded inner city facilities. But in the face of containerisation, national and local shipping agencies demand the rise of transfer traffic (Marashlieva 2006). At the end of 2006, a decision was made about further developments. A new container terminal will be built in the inner city because the biggest container ships can not pass the channel bridge. Also, new facilities for grain are planned. The port company owns land close to the city centre and wants to use it (Shterev 2006). An old railway station could be re-opened and integrated (see Fig. 1, point 1). Representatives of the city argue against this: They hold that this area was too close to the living quarters, and that the general development plan from 1997 allowed only for green space (Davat ... 2006; Veltcheva 2006).⁹

The Port of Varna: Images

A cosmopolitan population and cultural diversity are integral parts of the image of port cities (Hilling 1988: 23f.). Such diversity also existed in Varna: People in or from the city¹⁰ mentioned a “Greek quarter” and an “Armenian quarter” in the old inner city, the former relating to more than two millennia of history, the latter still quite visible with a well-frequented Armenian church. The oldest Bulgarian orthodox churches are also to be found in this area, along with the ruins of a Catholic church, and the remains of the Ashkenazi and Sephardic synagogues. North of the centre, historical maps show a residential quarter of Crimean Tatars (Nedelchev 2005: 4f.) who fled to the Ottoman Empire via the port of Varna in the 1850s-60s (Williams 2001: 209-12). While these groups could be linked to Varna’s history as a port city and trading centre, the Turkish minority is the biggest one in Bulgaria today, with approximately 10% of the population, but the expression “Turkish quarter” used in the city museum refers only to the western part of the old city which was built under Ottoman rule.¹¹ Several ethnic groups are stigmatised

9 This idea stems from the 1970s when a marina was planned there (Milko ... 2006).

10 A Varnaian architect, another former resident of Varna in Hamburg as well as an employee of the Varnaian Eimsbüttel-Büro and two passers-by who offered to show me around in Varna.

11 Many Turks left the newly founded Bulgaria in the 1880s, and again in the 1980s during the campaign to Bulgarise the Turkish- and Romani-Bulgarian population.

under the label “Tsigani” (gypsies), who with at least 3% are Bulgaria’s second biggest ethnic minority. Maksuda in the west of the centre, close to the port and to the old railway station, is known as a Romani quarter¹² and is labelled as a dangerous, drug-dealing site in the newspaper as well as by residents in Varna.¹³

Closely interlinked with the image of cosmopolitanism is the stereotype of an interesting “sailortown”. The historian Petar Stojanov pictures scenes of sailors seeking adventures in the company of women for the sailortown of Varna of the 1880s (Stojanov 1992: 66). They are also to be found in texts which more generally relate positively to the sailortown as “maritime heritage” (Schubert 2002b: 29) or celebrate it with romanticism and melancholy (Hilling 1988: 33). Even official texts of the Hamburgian senate use this image of romantic adventures to advertise for renewal of St. Pauli (Kossak 1987). In respect to Varna, experts from Hamburg voted to rid the inner city of the noisy and dirty port facilities, making room for a charming district¹⁴, thus illustrating Schubert’s description of this transformation process (Schubert 2002a: 12), as well as Charlier’s (1992) notion of a struggle between port and city about space, rather than inevitable development.

The contrast between perceptions in Hamburg and Varna perception is striking. People in or from Varna denied the existence of a sailortown. When asked in interviews, they only referred to the Greek quarter, or to the space around the railway station, which indeed borders directly to port facilities. The area was described as dirty, and as a dead edge. The presence of “strangers” and Roma in this area is seen as a negative factor. When one interviewee showed me the flat of a relative on a map, she was quite upset when I mentioned the close neighbourhood to the port and explained that this only looked that way on the map, but in reality both quarters had nothing to do with each other.¹⁵ Perceptions of the port-related area in Varna – dirt, danger and strangers – thus reflect those elements of the old sailortowns, which are not likely to be mar-

12 Many Roma live there in illegal squatter settlements which emerged in the 1990s (Khristov 2006).

13 One morning, my landlord warned me not to enter Maksuda, and during a evening festivity, both female employees of the Varnaian Eimsbüttel-Büro said that they would never go there (02-03/11/2006). On drug-dealing, see for example Draganov 2006.

14 During a walk in Varna 11/11/2005 and in two interviews conducted in Hamburg 10-11/04/2006.

15 Explanations by passers-by, a landlady, shopkeepers and waitresses I asked in Varna; interview with a former resident in Hamburg 10/10/2005. as well as with an employee of the Varnaian Eimsbüttel-Büro 04/11/2005. On a similar perception of the centre in Sofia see Varzonovtsev 2002: 125.

keted as tourist attractions (Hilling 1988: 35). In this context, the rapid renewal of the adjoining area, the restoration of old buildings and the construction of new ones, as well as the exorbitant rise of real estate prices in the central part of the town have developed not because of, but in spite of the proximity of the port.¹⁶ Although one expensive hotel facing the depot west of the railway station is called “Aqua”, all in all the rapid construction is not related to waterfront renewal, but reflects a recent process in many post-socialist cities, where old buildings had been rotting away for decades.¹⁷

The port and ships are by no means absent from the picture of Varna, however. Cranes and machinery can be seen from the eastern part of the old town.¹⁸

Men dressed in working gear are passing through the controlled gateways for lunch in cheap restaurants around. Shops and stalls offer the usual souvenirs, and port-related names and signs are to be found in bars and restaurants. In the streets nearby custom agencies and shipping companies are located. One of them resides in an old, restored warehouse from the 1850s. Two monuments from socialist times picture the port: a concrete ship reminds of the departure of Georgij Dimitroff for the Second World Congress of the Comintern 1920, and the “Pantheon” in the Sea Garden dedicated to resistance against fascism, shows also port scenes. In the middle of the old town, a building in the shape of a sail had been planned in the 1970s for the regional parliament (Arkitekti ... 2006). The navy museum, also from the communist era, exhibits in its garden the Draski, a ship which is well known in Bulgaria for its participation in a battle against Ottoman troops in 1913. The naval academy dominates the eastern skyline of the city, and in the centre nearby the cathedral new recruits of the navy are sworn in (Stotitsi ... 2006). Thus, the port works in the middle of the city, but it is represented as a national institution. When the port’s 100th birthday was celebrated in May 2006, this was mentioned only twice in the *Cherno More*. Under the title “Three hundred VIP-guests celebrate at the passenger terminal” the Prime Minister, the Transport Minister and the director of the port administration as well as representatives of European ports were

16 Compare Blum on Lisboa, where inner city planners ignored the southern bank of the Tejo because of its industrial image. (2007: 47; 50-51).

17 On the necessity of a multifaceted approach to inner city transition compare Gandelsman-Trier in this volume. For further cases of post-socialist inner city development compare Gdaniec 2005 on Moscow. Of course, crumbling inner cities are known also from western contexts. It is the timing which links the post-socialist cases. Whether this development is to be called gentrification remains to be discussed.

18 See point 1 in map 2.

named, and the cultural programme was organised by the navy (Marinova 2006a). Some sentences comment on a photograph of the Transport Minister and a small monument in honour of the birthday (Aleksieva 2006b).

The plans for the area, which will be left behind when the port moves, are unrelated to the area's "heritage". Shops, offices, exhibition halls and a new aquarium are planned. Central for the project will be the enlargement of the passenger terminal and the construction of a big marina (Shterev 2006). The city will host the Cutty Sark Race in 2008, the newspaper includes a section on sailing. As an expert from Varna stated, two German festivals which consist mainly of sailing events are supposed to serve as models for new festivals, and a Varna expert for youth and sports supports the organisation of international regatta events in Varna.¹⁹

Comparing the plans for Varna to the Hamburg HafenCity, a Varna architect announced that Varna is aiming mainly at tourism.²⁰ The new plans for the inner city are not explicitly seen as new uses for an old port area, but as a shining extension of the beach reaching out from the east (Marinova 2006b), and as an opportunity to bring together the city and the sea (Nestorov 2006).

Varna, tourism and the Sea Garden

Waterfront redevelopment often employs water as a "soft factor" in advertising a given city or quarter (Tölle 2005: 187). This does not only work in port cities or in old port areas. Water now is generally expected to add to the prestige of places, and to offer exciting chances for architecture (Tölle 2005: 88; Schubert 2002b: 15). In the case of Varna though, such hopes seem to have been disappointed. While Varna not only stretches along the shore of the Black Sea, but also along the eastern part of the Varna Lake, the lake not only lacks positive connotations, but has, like the port, even an explicitly negative image. In my interviews respondents stated that "gypsies are living there", while the lake itself is considered as polluted by various industries. Even the view to

19 During an official dinner with the Hamburgian experts in Varna, 01/11/2006. See also Vetrokhodtsi ... 2007.

20 Interview in Hamburg 13/04/2006. In general, while in socialist times the necessity of mixed use of Varna's city centre was stressed (Glucharov/Evrev 1980), new planning discussions do away with residential functions and emphasise administration, tourism and business as main functions (V tseintera ... 2006).

the water from a luxurious gated development in the hills, once praised in an English advertisement as “sea view”, was declared as less attractive because one could only see the lake and not the Black Sea.²¹

The sea, in contrast, is central to the image of Varna. This image in turn was central for the development of the city when the port lost its position between the wars. Structures for tourism were expanded, and Varna became the cultural and economic centre of the seaside resorts in northern Bulgaria and the whole region (Stojanov 2003: 29, 47, 75). In socialist Bulgaria, the economic meaning of tourism was not officially admitted, but the tourist industry was developed systematically. The seaside resorts became the “Red Riviera” which was also visited by tourists from the capitalist countries. Anthropologist Kristen Ghodsee describes wealth and the possibility to meet strangers as qualities of Bulgarian tourism, which often are associated with port cities: (Ghodsee 2005: 86-89, 97).²² Since the 1920s, Varna has been offering much more than just beach life to the tourists. The annual summer festival of music, a big and popular event, was installed at the time. There are also several other festivals of playacting, movies, graphics, and so on, many of them dealing with the sea. August 8th is the Day of the Fleet, an annual festival is called “The Sea and Memories”, art galleries present theme-orientated exhibitions, and on January 7th, a new year swimming event takes place in the bay.

Consequently, the Hamburg idea of introducing a “Hafengeburtstag” (port birthday) to Varna was changed in 2005. The event is now called “Europäisches Meeresfestival Darsalei” (“European Festival of the Sea Darsalei”) and is placed in the last week of May (Varna-Büro 2007). As one of the Hamburg experts related²³, this name is based on an explicit invention of tradition: Asked for a suitable historical precedent, a historian at the Varna archaeological museum came up with a marketable event: In the Odessos of the roman times, games were held in honour of a Thracian god named Darsalas. The fact that these took place in winter (Khristova 2006a) seemed like a minor flaw in the face of the exciting possibilities for marketing the god as a symbol for the city: The expert even suggested a special hymn and a musical. The “*Cherno More*” praised this initiative (Ot ... 2006) and announced a contest to design

21 In a discussion on the side during a meeting in Varna 03/11/2006.

22 Compare Hilling 1988: 35 about tourists, who are now the customers of the old sailertowns.

23 In a public meeting in Hamburg/Eimsbüttel devoted to the “Varna-Kreis” 30/01/2006.

Bulgarian mascots, one of them symbolising Varna and based on Dar-salas (Tsolova 2006).²⁴

According to the Hamburg expert, such a festival would change the main inner city streets to prestigious boulevards and “clean up” the adjoining streets. Already in the 1970s, a small part of the inner city had been changed significantly for touristic use. Some streets were beautifully restored and closed for cars (Pfau 1980: 613, compare the hatched area in the old city in Fig. 1).

Most cultural events are not taking place in the inner city, but in the *morskata gradina*, the Sea Garden. This park is more than anything else an object of desire in Varna. Its first paths were laid out under Ottoman rule in 1863. In the 1890s the well-known Czech garden architect Anton Novak planned many of the contemporary elements of the park (Stojanov 1992: 49), which was linked to the inner city with an impressive gate in 1939.²⁵

There, stretching from the pier almost eight kilometres eastward, the park widens far enough to make forget the surrounding traffic. From here, it follows the steep coast, and parallels the residential quarter *Primorski*, which has been prestigious in socialist times. Stairways, sometimes dangerously damaged, link the park to the beach, which in summer is accessible only in some areas because of license holders who build restaurants, cafés and discotheques right in the sand. In the park, old trees and bushes block the vista onto the water, until a broad place around the Pantheon opens up the view to the sea.

The park, its relation to the city and to the sea and the use of its space was a major point of debate among the planning experts from Hamburg, who proposed two different solutions.²⁶ One architect and urban planner claimed that the park was underused and suggested to break it up to introduce architectural links between the city and the sea, quoting the coastline of Barcelona and the Hamburg “Pearl Necklace” as examples of successful development. In his view, Varna is lacking “*gelebte Urbanität von Stadt und Meer*”²⁷ because in Varna, the proximity of the sea cannot be seen from the city. Two of his colleagues did not approve of his idea. Warning that such a plan would rob Varna of a

24 This is not an entirely new idea: in 2001, a “Varna-Day” was installed and a Varna anthem was performed for the first time (Na Goljama ... 2001; Za parvi ... 2007), while the plans from Hamburg have been delayed. The first “Sea Festival” now is planned for 2008 (Varna-Büro 2007).

25 See point 2 in map 2.

26 They discussed this during walks through Varna and in the interviews in Hamburg and often returned to these arguments later.

27 “lived urbanity of the city and the sea” (Interview 12/04/2006).

meaningful landmark and hence of an essential ingredient for a marketable image, they tried to direct the focus of waterfront development to the port facilities.

The experts thus discussed the aspect of water, or sea, in terms of image and urbanity, paralleling local debates in Varna. First and foremost, the role of the park for the inhabitants' identification with the city can hardly be overestimated (compare Lynch 1960). Without being explicitly asked, many of my interview partners mentioned the park in an affectionate way. The "centrality" of their own address was stressed by emphasising the short distance to the park entrance.²⁸ The park was named as an important landmark of the city, as the ideal place for relaxing walks and as the city's defence against the cold winds from the sea. In two cases, though, women remarked that beyond a certain distance to the centre, they did not feel safe anymore.²⁹ This corresponds to the use people made of the park. Even in November, the area of the entrance is full of people. Souvenirs, popcorn and beverages are sold. The cafés are expensive, but there are many public benches. Several leisure facilities, like a children's park, a zoo, and the dolphinarium, as well as institutions like the aquarium, the observatory and museums, public tennis courts and other sport facilities, a summer theatre, a new amphitheatre, as well as a part exclusively for mothers with small children are included in the park and groups of runners meet at the Pantheon. But further on in the eastern part, wide space remains empty in the off-season and adds a touch of abandonment.

Even so, plans for privatisation of the eastern sites of the park, and the construction of expensive and exclusive houses and hotels, have provoked angry reaction. Corruption is suspected to play its part in this emerging "Beverly Hills", as the area is called. The private use of space in the *morskata gradina*, as well as the mayor's opposition against it, are constant topics in the newspaper³⁰, although to link the city with the sea via the park, does not necessarily mean privatisation. According to a Varnaian architect (interview November 2006) it could even put an end to the private licensing of beach sites and improve the integration of park and city.

28 Residents of Varna 04/11/2005; 01/11/2006.

29 Former resident in Hamburg 10/10/2005; resident in Varna 04/11/2005.

30 Similar discussions can be found in Burgas, where in a park at the sea apartment buildings are planned (Vdigat ... 2006). These processes must also be seen in the framework of the Bulgarian environment program "natura" which forbids buildings in the proximity of the shore, which in turn is criticised as a serious obstacle for tourism and a breeding ground for corruption.

Besides being a place for leisure and relaxation and a link to the sea, the park is also a place where the history of Varna and Bulgaria is remembered. A broad, well-tended “Avenue of the Heroes of the Bulgarian National Rebirth” refers to the Bulgarian independence movement in the 19th century. It is lined by sculptures, the first of which was uncovered in 1911, and leads directly to the socialist Pantheon. There has been a debate about the destruction of memorials from the communist time in Varna (Tonovski 2005), but so far, this led nowhere.³¹ A newer memorial reminds of Ukrainian soldiers dying in battles in 1444, 1878 and 1944 in behalf of Bulgaria.³² The park thus offers opportunities to passers-by to place their own biography in the history and geography of Varna and Bulgaria. In turn, the park has become a place of political culture. In the Avenue, the navy honors Bulgarian heroes, but also less official political events of every colour are taking place there. To name only a few, the right-wing organisation Ataka has organised demonstrations against the EU and the NATO, mothers protested against the closing of child care facilities, and a HIV-solidarity group which is quite active in Varna has erected a red ribbon two metres high.

The *morskata gradina* (Sea Garden) is a significant urban institution in Varna. Its name matches Varna’s title “*morskata stolitsa*” (Capital of the Sea), adding to the image of the city as related to the sea. It also plays an important role in tourism, Varna’s most reliable and most profitable sea-related branch of economy, and offers qualities which connect space with history and personal memories, as well as space for collective action or for social contacts. Thus, physical and administrative changes affecting the park are perceived as a threat and indeed are likely to restrain these uses (compare Wonneberger in this volume).

Conclusion

Varna does not fully match the stages of waterfront revitalisation as predicted by Hoyle’s model. A focus on discussions among experts from Hamburg about the future of Varna shows, that port city renewal does

31 An interviewee pointed out that, although the communist regime was not to be romanticised, she is fond of the place because of its inseparable connection with her childhood memories of the many hours she spent there during rituals of the socialistic youth organisation (Hamburg, 10/10/2006).

32 Also, in the course of planning, constructing and uncovering of the monument, contacts between Varnaian and Ukrainian officials were fostered (Pametnik ... 2006; Aleksieva 2006a).

not develop “naturally”, but also results from conflicts about contested space.

Images emerge as a driving force in waterfront revitalisation, both in the sense of stereotypes (or “syndromes” according to Charlier 1992) of certain types of cities, or in the sense of marketing or image-building. In stressing the “need for water” in Varna’s image-building, the experts from Hamburg transported their experience from Hamburg to Bulgaria. Their perception of Varna focuses on belated development and deficits: the position of the port facilities seem outmoded, space seems under-used, the lack of urbanity at the shore is criticised against the examples of Barcelona and Hamburg and marketing and festival strategies are introduced as new.

In Varna, as in Hamburg, water is closely associated with the city’s history and the seaside resorts are an important factor in tourism. The *morskata gradina* is a place which physically and symbolically links Varna to the sea, offering opportunities to identify with the city and the nation. As one of Varna’s most important public spaces, it is an important resource for tourism and hence economically relevant. Architectural links to the sea would on the one hand split up the wide green park landscape in the centre of the city, but on the other hand could help to reopen the beaches to the public.

As this paper shows, waterfront development differs in respect to local history, economy and political conditions, which again are connected with images. Schubert’s (2002) call for the research of planning cultures and Charlier’s word of the “dockland syndrome” offer interesting challenges to anthropological research: A focus on the cultural construction of the principles of waterfront revitalisation would imply ethnographic research among experts and key decision makers (compare Nader’s “studying up” 1974).

Local factors do not alone determine the development of a given city. Urban planning (Bartley/Threadwell-Shine 2003: 161) and waterfront development (Tölle 2005: 1, 177) are, like the technological development of ports, international affairs (see Blum on Lisboa 2007: 47). Discussions about cities and waterfronts in a country like Bulgaria, which just has entered the European Union, therefore will add new perspectives to the study of image-building and of waterfront development.

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