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## Ports and media: A research project showcase

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## Ports and media: A research project showcase

### PortCityFutures: Mindsets and values, contestation and friction

Vincent Baptist, Francesca Savoldi, and Carola Hein

NECSUS 12 (1), Spring 2023

[PortCityFutures](#) is an interdisciplinary research center, originally set up between the Dutch universities of Delft, Rotterdam, and Leiden. It focuses on the legacies, uses, and future developments of port city regions, motivated to let port and city jointly evolve again, after decades in which these entities have increasingly grown apart under industrial imperatives. As port cities are uniquely located on the edge between sea and land, they have limited space for reinventing their infrastructurally dense and culturally rich territories. Yet, the historical trajectories of port cities also comprise a persistent resilience towards change and future challenges, which can be capitalised on by (re)cultivating shared values and mindsets.[1]

In order to investigate the evolving socio-spatial and cultural conditions that have mutually shaped ports and

cities, PortCityFutures provides an international platform for a continuously growing group of scholars and practitioners interested in the many domains through which the maritime and urban sphere meet. PortCityFutures organises monthly research meetings that are open to all and hosts an online research blog. It has established MOOCs and a special educational Minor program, in which participants use both historical thinking and design fiction practices to instigate the reimagining of port city regions. Discussions on shared design principles and values steer critical and creative views on how to envision port cities whereby corporate, governing, and civic stakeholders are better aligned again for the future of their living and work environment.



Fig. 1: PortCityFutures video 'The Magic of Port' [Cities](#)'.

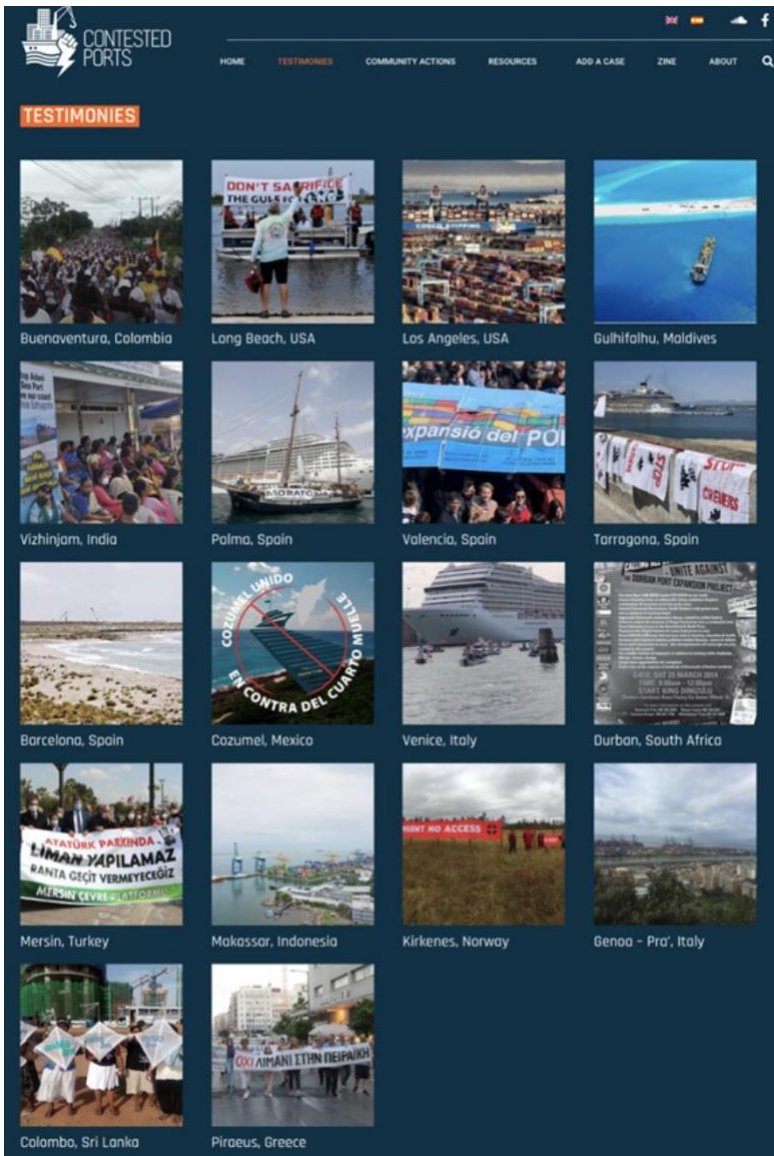


Fig. 2: PortCityFutures design fiction (Beyond Oil Studio, History of Architecture and Urban Planning, TU Delft: Benjamin Evans, Samuel Hartman, Adam Hill, Anne de Jong, Sophie van Riel; see also Hein 2020b).

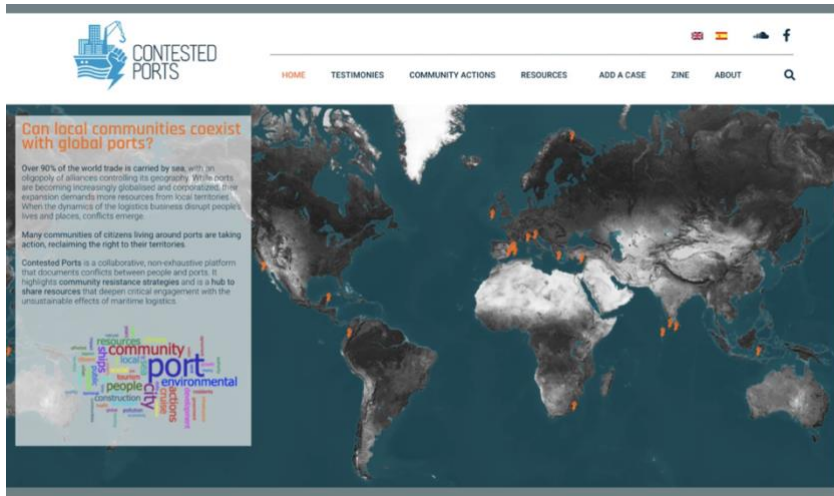
PortCityFutures disseminates its research activities through a wide variety of publications, special journal issues,[2] and conference reports.[3] It connects with local residents, actors, and institutions of the maritime urban spaces it investigates through impactful research-driven output, from a podcast that captures the sounds and stories of Rotterdam's river delta to a serious board game for teaching the socio-cultural significance of water values. Most importantly, PortCityFutures acts as a network to connect other researchers and projects that focus on port city regions in light of their multifaceted future challenges, from climate change and energy

transitions to issues of cultural diversity and social cohesion. One of these projects connected to PortCityFutures is ContestedPorts.

Established by human geographer Francesca Savoldi, [ContestedPorts](#) is an online platform dedicated to citizen struggles in port cities, documenting cases of social mobilisation by using direct accounts from active citizens, scholars, and NGO members engaged on the ground. As logistical integration is reconfiguring maritime shipping through strategies of concentration that decrease transport prices and consolidate power and governance, frictions between ports and cities are rising. In showing the ubiquity of civic contestation in ports, the platform shares resources such as strategies of community resistance, scientific publications on relevant issues, and non-academic resources including documentaries, podcasts, and the collaborative zine *People, Ports and Power*.<sup>[4]</sup>



Figs 3, 4: ContestedPorts web pages.



Port cities are paradigmatic examples of the complex and increasingly challenging terms of coexistence between people and the multiscalar infrastructures serving global logistics. These territories are experiencing unprecedented challenges, driven by the financial and spatial reshaping of logistics and combined with the acceleration of the global climate crisis, which make port cities particularly vulnerable to coastal flooding, erosion, and sea-level rise. As the power geometries of port-city relationships are being reshaped, the agency of inhabitants is challenged as well.

Over the last thirty years, many ports have spatially dissociated themselves from their adjacent cities. Increasingly expanding and impenetrable port

infrastructure has in some cases deprived maritime communities from access to the sea, while trans-shipment activities have further detached ports from regional economies, with automation often leading to labor precarity. In some cases, this has evolved into a real disconnection between the port and local inhabitants, who now question whether an infrastructure that keeps demanding more resources while exacerbating ecological damage should still be a priority in their city.

Social mobilisation is rising in ports across the world, with inhabitants fighting to reclaim their territories. Collective processes of knowledge production, participatory strategies, and the search for consensus based on shared values are loaded with emancipatory potential. Narratives based and focused on human rights, commons, and the right to the city form part of this constellation of contestation. These social mobilisations are also fostering civic sensibilities for environmental justice, and centering on more participative and democratic forms of governance.

The objective of ContestedPorts is to create awareness on the symptomatic and interconnected nature of frictions between ports and cities, providing a space for



the transmission of knowledge across different contesting communities, ranging from civic society to specialist voices. Within PortCityFutures, the platform is also a point of departure for new networking activities: a roundtable held at the University of Amsterdam in the Summer of 2022 for instance brought together scholars, citizens, and activists from five port cities for engaged and practice-oriented discussions.[5]

While port cities are increasingly becoming territories of great challenges, they also harbor power as terrain for change and innovation. Emerging from the research principles, design practices, education initiatives, and social outreach adopted in PortCityFutures and affiliated projects is a holistic program grounded in academic activities and explicitly reaching out to all stakeholders inhabiting the port city regions under investigation, to rethink, reorient, and redesign these towards a future with mutual benefits for port and city, renewed cultural and socio-spatial synergies, and regenerative practices driven by environmental justice and participatory governance.

## Showcasing the ‘Ports, Past and Present’ project through its media

by James Louis Smith

The Irish Sea basin forms a distinct node of histories, economies, and identities. The [Ports, Past and Present](#) project considers five very different ports and their communities on either side of the sea: Dublin Port, Rosslare Harbour, Holyhead, Fishguard, and Pembroke Dock. Project partners are University College Cork, Aberystwyth University, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, and Wexford County Council. The project has enhanced engagement among port town communities with their own rich heritage and that of the Irish Sea, and as such used that heritage to promote tourism and deepen a sense of shared identity.

At its heart, the role of the project has been to shake deeply held associations of ports with unpleasantness, boredom, negative emotions and affects, and industrial coldness. Ports are vibrant places filled with stories, cultures, people, and social bonds; and beyond the arbitrary boundaries of a port precinct lie environs that connect to, but exist independently of, port infrastructure. Ports are exciting, nodal, colourful, and worldly. They are about people and not infrastructure

alone, although their social identity is deeply socio-environmental and socio-technological.

In order to achieve this ambition, the project consisted of three relevant strands of research: [Creative Connections](#), commissioning and supporting 12 creative practitioners with projects tied to the five ports of the project and to the Irish Sea itself; a set of [documentary films](#) drawing on social research and community participation to present a nuanced and positive vision of the five ports and their ferry crossings; a set of [heritage stories](#) curated using the [Omeka](#) heritage content management system; and the heritage app [Port Places](#). Taken together, these project initiatives have produced an abundance of content in a variety of media.

[Embed the as iframe:

<https://repository.dri.ie/mirador/?manifest=https://repository.dri.ie/iiif/9k42c648g/manifest.json>]

The range of approaches taken by the project is as broad as the range of material that it has produced. The [creative content](#) ranges from [postcards](#) by Julie Merriman made with risographs and other obsolete print media to a [radio play](#) by Peter Murphy in response

to Dylan Thomas' 1954 *Under Milk Wood*. There is an Augustine O'Donoghue [diorama and soundscape](#) staging an uprising of Dublin's Seagulls over their mistreatment by humans, and a [book](#) of tall tales and Fishguard fibs by Peter Stevenson. David Begley worked with Wexford school children to create a [stop motion film](#) of charcoal drawings with its own classical score, and [Gillian Brownson](#) combines poetry and art in a set of poems and a book of children's stories. The project has displayed the creative work in a variety of venues across the Irish Sea and some of the material comes to life in situ, such as a born digital geolocated [audio tour](#) of Dublin's docklands by Rua Barron and Hannah Power.

The [documentary films](#) are also a work of diversity, combining drone footage, archival research and historic images, footage of local people and specialists going about their business, and expansive visions of the Irish Sea coast. They present a positive vision of the Irish Sea and its environs through engaging with the deep history of the regions, the lives of interesting and diverse people, and the impressive visuals of the ferry crossings. They are a public good, available under a non-commercial Creative Commons license, but available in extremely high-quality video files suitable for screening

as well as lower quality videos for smaller screens. The process overseen by [Mother Goose Films](#) that created them was complicated by the pandemic, and care and attention was taken to avoid the footage ageing prematurely due to signs of visible mask wearing. As a result, the filming also generated a huge trove of valuable [film stills](#) that capture a range of used and unused footage. The use of drone photography created an impressive and currently unrivalled set of images of the five port towns.

[Embed: <https://youtu.be/KkmUuDqKD1c>]

The story [collection](#) of the project makes use of [Curatescape](#), a theme and toolkit for Omeka created by the Cleveland State University Centre for Public History + Digital Humanities. It explores over 250 perspectives on the region through a combination of photographic galleries, text stories, audio commentary, and videos mapped onto a ‘deep map’ with a rich cloud of interrelated tags. The range of topics within the collection can best be experienced through a series of [tours](#) on a variety of topics. The [Port Places app](#) draws on the material found within the story collection, project outputs, and stakeholder contributions to bring the past to life in situ. It contains ‘experiences’ for each

of the three ferry crossings, a renewed town trail for Pembroke dock, two creative projects, and a series of walks and guides to urban and natural sites. It can be downloaded on [Android](#) and [Apple](#) smartphones now. The material components of the app are accompanied by a series of walks and other community events to build buy-in for its features. It is a fully open source and open data project, practicing app development as regional development.

The project has created a far wider range and quantity of media and media formats than was initially anticipated, from sound art to radio plays, art to mosaics, text to video. In addition to both physical and born digital objects, Ports, Past and Present has generated a huge trove of photography surrounding its activities, much of it taken by professional photographer and project member [Dr Martin Crampin](#). Project postdoctoral fellow [Dr James Louis Smith](#) is currently in the process of shaping a [sustainable archive](#) of its cultural heritage outputs on the [Digital Repository of Ireland](#), a national CoreTrustSeal repository. Selected Welsh content will also be curated on the [Peoples Collection Wales](#) by [Dr Rita Singer](#). These archived assets will be of interest to scholars of film and media studies because it reveals how far it is necessary to

stretch in order to capture the range of possible modes by which the Irish Sea basin and its ports are visible. The sustainability plan will be complete and content readily available through a new website by project end in July 2023.

Social Media:

Ports, Past and Present Website:

<https://portspastpresent.eu/>

PPP Archive: <https://doi.org/10.7486/DRI.ht259b362>

PPP Twitter: <https://twitter.com/PortsPastPres/>

PPP Instagram:

<https://www.instagram.com/portspastandpresent/>

PPP YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/@portspastandpresent>

PPP Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/portspastandpresent/>

## **Sustainable subsea networks: Connecting ports, ships, and cables**

by George N. Ramírez

Ports are infrastructures of the global internet. This might seem counterintuitive, as most people imagine the internet as a wireless and aerial phenomenon. Today, however, 99% of transoceanic data traffic runs through subsea telecommunications cables. These cables are in turn installed and maintained by a fuel-intensive fleet of ships. Ports are the support infrastructure for this fleet, and as a result the capacities of ports shape the potential of the internet, especially its potential sustainability.

The environmental impact of the internet continues to be a concern for scholars, companies, and users around the world.[6] Many studies of information and communications technologies (ICT) and the environment attend to the impacts of particular infrastructures: data centers, terrestrial networks, end-user-devices, and satellites.[7] Data centers have been given a sustained focus because of their significant electricity consumption.[8] The internet has become essential to connect a globalised society, and it is



imperative for ICT industries to consider sustainability in their business models.

Sustainable Subsea Networks is a research initiative of the SubOptic Foundation and funded by the Internet Society Foundation. Our main goal is to study the sustainability of the network of subsea cables through partnerships with industry members and academic researchers. To do so, we are cataloguing best practices within the industry, assembling a carbon footprint of a cable system, and documenting the role of policy and regulation. As the internet dependency deepens and the planet continues to experience climate change, it is critical to understand how these networks impact our environment. This entails recognising how to enhance the sustainable operations of all elements of the network.

Subsea cables have been largely left out of carbon footprinting studies because of their relatively small electricity usage compared to data centers and last mile infrastructures.[9] However, when we consider subsea cables and their environmental effects, it becomes evident that their impacts are not solely a product of their ongoing electrical usage, but of their dependence on marine vessels, which also contributes to their

carbon emissions. Part of the project of decarbonising the internet is making this fleet more sustainable. But this is hard because of the significant financial investment it would take to replace a full line of ships.

Marine technologies have changed quickly over the past decades, and outdated infrastructure is not as energy efficient. Even if subsea cable companies had the capital expenditure to replace a fleet, carriers would have to find a way to dispose or recycle the ships, which would also have an impact on the environment. Part of what the Sustainable Subsea Networks team aims to accomplish is to map the enabling and constraining factors for sustainability. In addition, although sustainability work is already being undertaken, this work is not shared widely. As companies continue to focus and invest on sustainability, we want to share their strategies and generate new knowledge about enabling and constraining factors, in turn facilitating this sustainable transition.

One of the difficulties in decarbonising marine vessels is that this also requires upgrades in port infrastructure. Alongside the ICT industry, port authorities have been encouraged to reduce their emissions because of ships' negative environmental effects. Collaboration between

port authorities and industries dependent on marine vessels can help reduce emissions through mutual investment in sustainable technologies. For instance, the cable company Global Marine's fleet is shore power compatible, meaning their vessels can plug into the landside electric grid at Port Washington, US and Portland, UK while at berth. However, our research has shown that this kind of technological upgrade is only possible around the world because of mutual investments and long-standing relationships between ship carriers and port terminal operators. Through our work, we have found that many ports have begun investing in shore power because of its significant contribution to reducing emissions. For the subsea cable industry, shore power has been of great interest because many existing vessels can be retrofitted to use this resource.

Also known as onshore power supply (OPS), shore power has been suggested as a sustainable technology for decades. In my interviews with port authorities around the world, I learned that there is no single solution to decarbonise marine transport – vessel owners are investing in a range of technologies to maximise their emissions reduction. In order to encourage the subsea cable industry to consider as

many strategies as possible, our research team developed the Sustainable Subsea Networks Map (Figure 6). A product of interviews with industry experts and analyses of company reports, the map recommends strategies such as extending the lifetime of cables, meeting international standards, and deploying energy efficiency technologies. Given the impact of shore power and port infrastructures in reducing emissions, the map also demarcates ports where shore-side power is available for cable ships as well as ports that are regularly used by cable ships for this very resource.

Developing collaborative relationships between ports and ICT can enable these industries to work together to decarbonise the internet. By publishing and sharing our work, the Sustainable Subsea Networks project enables the development of these mutually beneficial relationships. In addition to shore power, many ports have researched and adapted new energy sources such as hydrogen, ammonia, and methanol. Although fuel transition is further away on the horizon, there is still coordination needed with ship owners as parallel investments are required. Sustainable Subsea Networks encourages us to think about these industries and their developments together, especially the role of marine vessels and ports in subsea cable maintenance. Doing so,

and positioning ports as part of the global internet telecommunications network, will open up new pathways for collaboration and change.

This article is an output from a [SubOptic Foundation project](#) funded by the Internet Society Foundation.

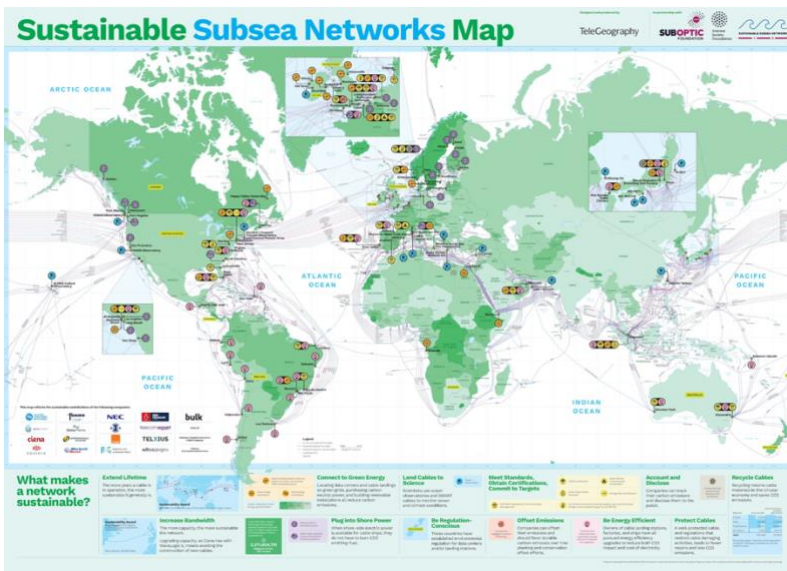


Fig. 5: The Sustainable Subsea Networks map documents a range of sustainability initiatives across the subsea industry. Along with other best practices, the map highlights ports around the world that offer shore power, as well as ports that cable ships frequently stop at to access onshore power. Designed and produced by TeleGeography, in partnership with the SubOptic Foundation's Sustainable Subsea Networks research initiative and funded by an Internet Society Foundation grant.

## Screening the port city

by Wyatt Moss-Wellington, Ming-yeh T. Rawnsley, and Yat Ming Loo

The Screening the Port City interdisciplinary working group brings together expertise in film studies, city branding, architecture, and public diplomacy to examine the representation of ports, harbours, and docks in fiction and documentary filmmaking. We take a comparative look at the ways in which screen media has motivated images of ports as symbols of transience, human movement, and the history of transnational traffic and contact. The myth-making capacity of these images has had implications for the promotion of seaport cities as historically vital and at once nostalgic and forward-looking places. Our study compares screen fictions and imagery from nonfictive sources, including television documentaries. It considers the positioning of the port within a cityscape, and its presentation as either an ‘other place’ removed from the quotidian routines of the city, or as continuous with urban architecture and life. We note the way the aesthetics of the cinematic city contribute to a geographic imaginary of ports from around the world.

Our initial study collected and compared 29 films from diverse national cinemas that dramatised lifeworlds in port cities. These were evaluated against promotional examples that tended to minimise images of port city inhabitants to instead emphasise the port as a site of

industry and progress, to which human lives become subject. The study has so far revealed insights into a politics of identity and mobility that is addressed through port city cinema, and the use of harbourside imagery in city- and nation-branding, as well as touristic narratives. The group published two research essays in 2022, 'Screening the Port City: Poetics and Promotions' in *Genre* 55.2, and a chapter in the Routledge collection *China's International Communication and Relationship Building* titled 'Changing Representations of Modernity and Mobility: Chinese External Communications in *Song of the Fisherman* and China's Port City TV Documentaries'. Another article, 'Representation of Intersectional and Cultural Identities in Taiwanese-Language Port City Cinema', is forthcoming this year in the *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture*.

Examples:

*Huilai Anping Gang (Back to Anping Harbor)*, Taiwan:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G6\\_Jp0itSTQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G6_Jp0itSTQ)

While our project surveyed port city films from around the world, we took Taiwanese cinemas as a particular case study. This film presents a good example of unequal mobility structures across gender, ethnic, and intergenerational identities, explored in many port city fiction films. Taiwanese examples are explored in detail

in our upcoming article for *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture*.

*Port of London*, UK:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNfqz0Y3q2w>

This represents our interest in port city documentaries, which tend to minimise the detail of lives as lived in port cities or conflicts arising from traumatic histories of human movement, in favour of a more epideictic rhetoric of the nation state as told through machines and processes the state invests in. We also address Chinese examples in depth in [our chapter for the Routledge collection](#) *China's International Communication and Relationship Building*.

*Sea Point Days*, South Africa:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5V4oh0u5Jw>

Our project also considers ethnographic documentary. The South African film *Sea Point Days* was one of our primary examples, explored in detail in the *Genre* article '[Screening the Port City: Poetics and Promotions](#)'. Its more lyrical interest in diverse lifeworlds and post-Apartheid tensions within a Cape Town seaside community provides a counterpoint to the touristic and promotional documentaries we surveyed.



## **Musicians' labor organisation in the port city of Valparaíso**

by Eileen Karmy

Musical Memory of Valparaíso is a [website](#) and an ongoing research project holding a digital archive about musicians working in the Chilean port city from the late 19th to well into the 20th century. Valparaíso was the most commercial center of the country, an industrial port city connected with the rest of the world through transoceanic navigation routes. It enabled the circulation of ideas, people, and cultural objects, such as records, sheet music, films, newspapers, and magazines. The city also witnessed the development of industrial capitalism, enacting practices of exploitation and economic decline, strengthening the labour movement and the rise of left-wing ideologies.

Our project started in 2015, under the initiative of my colleague Cristian Molina and myself, with the objective to make known our research about one of the oldest musicians' guilds in Chile: the Musicians' Mutual Aid Society of Valparaíso, founded in 1893. This Society aimed to protect musicians' working lives, supporting those in need via the administration of collective funding. Musicians' working conditions were similar to

those of skilled and craft workers; however, as our research found, their jobs had their own particularities. To fill the gap on the history of working musicians in Chile, we wanted to systematise the biographies of the largely unknown musicians who worked in Valparaíso, analyse their working lives, bring awareness to the music they played, and unveil the challenges they faced to collectively organise during the rise of the labor movement.

The website began as a digital repository of [photographs](#), short [posts](#), and a selection of the minutes of meetings of the Musicians' Mutual Aid Society of Valparaíso (est. 1893) and the Professional Musicians' Union of the same city (est. 1931). The project relied heavily on the digitisation and analysis of the documents of these musicians' organisations. It was the very first examination of such documents which contain the history of musicians' organisations in Chile. The documents include letters, leaflets, photographs, and minutes of meetings, mostly handwritten by its members.

Delving into the documents, new findings came up and we needed to launch new sections on the website. In the '[Music](#)' section people can find music that was written,

arranged, or performed by musicians who worked in Valparaíso. Music is either available in scores or recordings, however much of these repertoires was not generally recorded. So to know how these pieces sound, we had to do the work. Drawing from the published score we began making [midi-recordings](#), we collaborated with colleagues who had already [recorded some pieces](#) and hyperlinked those to our website. But soon after, we undertook a new project to record musical pieces that were written decades ago but were never recorded.

In the 1920s, as in many other port towns around the world, jazz was widespread among the working class and the urban underworld. It permeated union guilds, community groups, and neighbour organisations with workers and youngsters performing, listening to, and dancing foxtrots, one-steps, and other varieties of the jazz genre. Pablo Garrido (1905-1982) was the most important musicians' union leader in Chile during the first half of the 20th century. He was a left-wing intellectual, composer, violinist, and orchestral conductor, who founded the first jazz band in the country and wrote the first groundbreaking ethnomusicological book on Chilean cueca. He traveled the world researching, playing, and composing,

however most of his music was not recorded, and therefore remained unknown. Five professional musicians[10] recorded the digital album [Obras Escogidas de Pablo Garrido](#) that we launched in 2021, with eight of his compositions.

The website is still growing and, with Estefanía Urqueta, we are preparing to launch a new section to hold the digital archive of another key musician of this story: [Pedro Cesari](#), an Italian maestro who worked in the Southern Cone in the late 19th century and founded the Musicians' Mutual Aid Society of Valparaíso. His transnational musical work is a great case study to deeply understand the historical relevance of Valparaíso as a cosmopolitan port city at the turn of the century, where workers, music, and ideas from all over the world coalesced.

Memoria Musical de Valparaíso Website:

<http://memoriamusicalvalpo.cl/>

MMV Twitter: <https://twitter.com/MusicalValpo>

MMV Instagram:

<https://www.instagram.com/memoriamusicalvalpo/>

MMV Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/memoriamusicalvalpo/>

MMV YouTube:

<https://youtube.com/@memoriamusicaldevalparaiso5637>

## **Pleasurescapes: From maritime stereotypes to uncanny infrastructures**

by Vincent Baptist, Judit Vidiella Pagès, and Aurelio Castro-Varela

Where people have fun, encounters happen. Where encounters take place, change begins. Are pleasurescapes in port cities Europe's true driving forces after all?

With this tagline, the research project [Pleasurescapes](#), funded by HERA (Humanities in the European Research Area) and running from 2019 to 2022, investigated historical spaces and legacies of modern entertainment and deviant culture across European port cities. Established as a collaboration between scholars from the port cities of Hamburg, Rotterdam, Barcelona, and Gothenburg, the Pleasurescapes project sought to address the dominance that has traditionally been reserved for port cities' economic and industrial importance, and rebalance this by shedding light on their underexplored cultural heritage. In doing so, the

research team utilised the new ‘pleasurescapes’ concept to craft links between past and present maritime urban contact zones, from bygone sailortowns to contemporary waterfronts, but also to point the attention to overlooked international events and intriguing cultural practices that found a fertile breeding ground in port cities’ transnational environments. Main publications focused both on the conceptual ramifications of the ‘pleasurescapes’ term and its operationalisation within different contexts.[11] Additionally, the project’s final output intends to reimagine and recount the cultural counter-narratives of the investigated port cities: a museum exhibition and theater play, both based on sources and heritage objects uncovered during the collaborative research, are set to launch in the coming year.

This cultural output will reconnect audiences in port cities to their roots, so to speak: by (re)presenting the cultural traces that have made port cities stand out from other cities through history, and by showcasing how such legacies are still being reworked nowadays to competitively position maritime urban environments. Think of Hamburg’s famous Reeperbahn, a pleasurecape par excellence, whose dense cultural facilities nowadays present a glossier, touristified

version of the rowdy sailor street it once was, populated with seafarers and 'women of pleasure'.<sup>[12]</sup> Such quintessential figures, together with other emblems like anchors, lighthouses, and mermaids, have become firmly ingrained in the general public's imagination of port cities and the maritime sphere. Contemporary usage of this kind of iconography often appears more lucrative than subversive, however. A recent campaign to market Katendrecht, a formerly neglected port peninsula in Rotterdam with a past as Chinatown and red light district, for instance appropriated stereotypical sailor imagery to attract more affluent resident groups, thereby uncovering strong ambivalences among former inhabitants regarding the use of such nostalgic and class-based markers.<sup>[13]</sup>

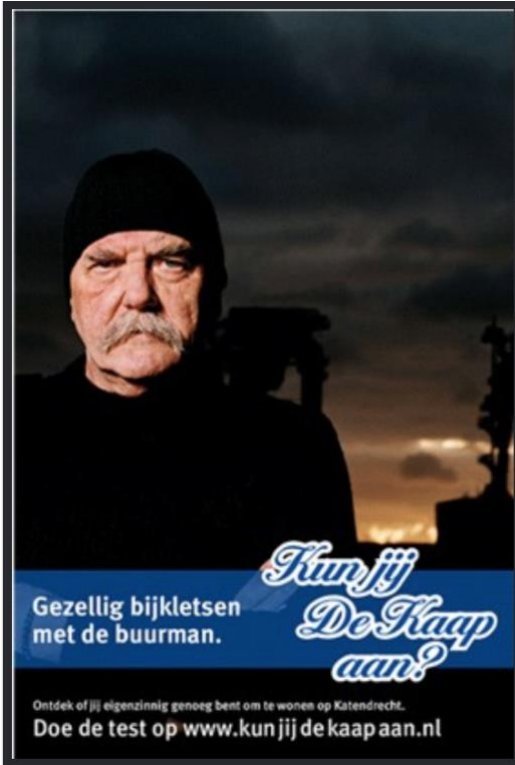


Fig. 6: Residential campaign poster for Katendrecht, Rotterdam (2006).

Class-based tensions have underlaid many older instances of socio-cultural appropriation and control in other port cities, from the strict practices of alcohol licensing and shifts towards civilised amusement parks in Gothenburg,[14] for example, to the 1929 Barcelona International Exhibition.[15] During the latter event, Barcelona's local elites saw an opportunity to turn Montjuïc, a mountain overlooking the harbour from the



southeast, into a site of civic values, modernisation, and monumental character. To this end, a set of modern infrastructures (gardens, pavilions, a funicular railway) came to re-urbanise Montjuïc. This established a landscape streamlined for the middle class and attuned to principles of morality and beauty, while simultaneously sweeping away very different, more informal pleasure practices on the mountain: picnic areas next to rural fountains and surrounded by barren land. The clash between these two forms of entertainment on the same urban waterfront shows how the material and the cultural can become 'hyphenated', [16] through the infrastructural patterning of pleasure and social life.



Fig. 7: Picnicking crowd on Montjuïc, Barcelona (1907).

During early-20<sup>th</sup> century modernity, entertainment in port cities not only concerned the arrival of varied groups of people looking for fun; it also depended on socio-material forms that shaped these urban milieus to offer that fun and make cultural exchanges possible. In other words, pleasure in port cities required infrastructures to be located, displayed, felt, and valued within specific areas. From avenues to docks, parks, cafes, terraces, theaters, or brothels, these spaces all entailed particular ways of lighting up, making audible and visible, arranging mobility, leading to encounters or even hiding from social conventions. These infrastructures were therefore not fixed or inert, but rather alive in their mediation of the entertainment on offer, and in the spreading of new cultural repertoires and practices coming from overseas. This mediating role can be ascribed to port cities on a more general level. Their role as logistical hubs is not merely a technical one, but also often establishes a reciprocal relationship with local elites and entrepreneurs regarding the management of a successful industrial complex that can bring competitive advantages and prestige. As much as this side of port cities has been meticulously planned and replanned by actors throughout history, their equally crucial role as a mediating ‘switchboard of culture’ has proven more

heterogeneous,[17] even giving an impulse to cultural fringe practices as another Barcelona-related example shows.

Due to the historical connection between maritime trade and freedom of conscience, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century European port cities like Barcelona took the lead in cultivating and articulating novel socio-cultural practices and ideals. New forms of entertainment even included spiritualistic practices and hypnotic experiments related to the modern supernatural, which spread through transnational flows supported by the rapid expansion of new transport and communication means.[18] Spiritism built ‘real and productive communication networks around an infrastructural uncanny’,[19] which travelled over land, overseas, and wirelessly to reach millions of people. As with the transmission of global epidemics or traditional cultural repertoires, port cities were nodal points in this infrastructural communication network through which supernatural literature and seance practices spread from the US to Europe. The historical spread of spiritist leader Allan Kardec’s ideas is illustrative in this respect: news articles from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century recount how 300 of Kardec’s forbidden books became a pawn in the hands of clandestine maritime trade networks, with

merchant captains, notaries, and editors all weighing in on the cargo's sea routes. On arrival in Barcelona, however, the books were confiscated by order of Bishop Antoni Palau, who burned them on 9 October 1861 at Ciutadella Park in a ritual of public penance to condemn heretics. Nevertheless, Kardec's work remained very impactful on Barcelona's maritime pleasurescapes and populace, and its transnational allure did not die out immediately. In the Netherlands, the translator of Kardec's work was J.G. Plate, son of an important merchant – linked to the port of Rotterdam.



Fig. 8: Impression of a spiritualist seance published in a Spanish newspaper (1853).

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## Notes

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