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DOI

[10.7480/spool.2021.1.5919](https://doi.org/10.7480/spool.2021.1.5919)

Publication date

2021

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Spool

Citation (APA)

Tanis, F., van der Hoeven, F., & Schrijver, L. (2021). Narratives of Eastern Mediterranean and Atlantic European cities. *Spool*, 8(1 #1), 3-4. <https://doi.org/10.7480/spool.2021.1.5919>

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Narratives of Eastern Mediterranean and Atlantic European cities

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Port cities have traditionally played an essential role in local and transnational networks. The spatial imprints of cross-border flows and socio-spatial interactions in port cities have left intertwined and entangled histories. However, the physical presence of these rich histories is not always visible.

Port cities have undergone a number of socio-spatial metamorphoses since the early 20th-century. A series of local and global events have triggered significant transformations, among these:

- Globalisation
- Natural and human-made disasters
- De-industrialisation and changes in regulation (neo-liberal policies)
- Changing social conditions (migration and population exchanges)

Such events have resulted in rapid, sometimes haphazard, urbanisation while, in other cases, regeneration projects have erased traces of history in many places. Many East Mediterranean and Atlantic European cities were also affected by armed conflicts. Contemporary waterfront regeneration projects produce generic results that further conceal the marks from the past.

Despite the physical transformations of port cities, historical narratives remain. Global trade and transnational exchange left tangible imprints on urban patterns and manifested themselves in cultural expressions such as paintings, engravings, travelogues, novels, travel books, and poems. Authors, artists, and travellers found inspiration in port facilities such as quays, customs houses, warehouses and site-specific urban typologies and street patterns, and social spaces in the cities.

Many protagonists are brought together in such narratives, from elite traders, local governors, and white-collar workers (e.g. engineers, developers), to the domestic and foreign labour classes, transit passengers and sailors, and local inhabitants.

This issue of Spool seeks to investigate narratives on the architecture, culture and development of coastal cities. We have challenged authors to present how narratives inform designers and how narratives are used in contemporary design approaches?

What is the role of the architect/planner in the contemporary narrative formation of port cities, particularly in the changing context of port-city relations?

We have selected seven contributions for this issue of Spool, four from the Eastern Mediterranean basin (Istanbul, Beirut, Acre and Jaffa) and three from Atlantic Europe (Bodø, Matosinhos and Gafanha da Nazaré).

Roula El Khoury and Paola Ardizzola address the post-civil war reconstruction of Beirut in Lebanon and reveal how neoliberal models of development resulted in a generic city.

Adem Erdem Erbas uses the Istanbul port heritage area in Turkey to showcase how GIS helps to consider underground cultural inventory from a historic landscape perspective within the framework of the conservation plans.

Ana Jayone Yarza Pérez explores the potential of adaptive reuse evaluation procedure in the Old City of Acre, Israel, as a means to deal with development and gentrification in this World Heritage site.

Komal Potdar explores the historical evolution of the old town, cultural geography, and the current state of exclusion and gentrification in Jaffa, Israel. She underlines the need for discourse on socio-spatial analysis and assessment for decision-making processes for urban heritage design.

Diego Inglez de Souza and Ivo Pereira de Oliveira reconnect architectural history with social and industrial accounts as a strategy for understanding the relationship between infrastructure, fishing, and urbanisation by studying the emblematic case of Matosinhos, Portugal.

André Tavares seeks to trace the links between fluctuations in the natural cod resources, the technologies used by fishermen to catch and process the fish, and the development of coastal landscapes and the urban form of the fishing port Gafanha da Nazaré, Portugal.

And finally, Fatma Tanis uses an interview with architect Daniel Rosbottom from DHDR to provide insight into situated architecture in port cities by addressing a library and concert hall project realised in Bodø, Norway.

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