

Urban Waterfronts - Learning from legacies: lessons from the past pointers for the future

By

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Abstract

This paper will investigate the contemporary issues in waterfront regeneration strategies. It will aim to evaluate and analyse the legacies from past national waterfront projects through case examples and review policy practices, trends and issues that pertain to waterfront regeneration and the impact of these within tourism and cultural contexts.

Specifically the paper has several objectives which will aim to identify the legacies and lessons learnt from waterfront regeneration projects. In this context past policy contexts for waterfront regeneration and the key interests between the broad and diverse stakeholder groups are reviewed. Key roles between that of the public and private sectors in the regeneration process and the often conflicting and controversial issues that result are explored. The paper will also review the historical contexts and nature of waterfront regeneration projects, especially American influences, and the extent to which projects in the US have been transposed to adapt to the European contexts. Case examples will be used to illustrate good and bad practices. In this respect the paper highlights the current issues that policy makers should consider when investing in waterfront projects. As such the paper gives pointers and recommendations for the direction of future waterfront development strategies which in essence, it concludes, should aim to accommodate more inclusive, socially responsible, culturally relevant and integrated planning development objectives to ensure future success.

Introduction

A major phenomenon of the last two decades of the twentieth century was the interest expressed in the re-development and regeneration of derelict or decaying docklands and associated waterfronts especially in inner city areas. Indeed, the regeneration of many derelict docksides was very much a mark for urban planning and regeneration strategies at that time. They, in turn, paved the way for many waterfront regeneration projects across the globe since then (Smith, 2012), (Desfor, 2012) and (Timur, 2013).

Much has been written about the phenomena of waterfront redevelopment often under the auspices of broader urban regeneration or cultural regeneration strategies (Smith, 2007), (Jones 1998; 2007).

Warman in 1990 alluded to this growing initial interest in waterfronts by stating that "*The waterfront is now a magic ingredient quenching the desire of many companies for an environmentally pleasing workplace*" (Warman, 1990). It is a sentiment and indeed a phenomenon which has now transformed many waterfront and city dockland areas since that time.

Today it is well documented that waterfront projects have become common-place in the process of urban regeneration worldwide. Indeed the revitalisation of docklands and associated waterfront development areas has been discussed at length by a number of authors. Early assessments by for example, Breen and Rigby (1985), Hoyle et al (1988) and Falk (1989). More recent reviews by, for example, Meyer (2000), Burayidi (2001), Marshal (2001) Jones (1998 & 2007) and, Falk (2003) and more contemporary evaluations by authors such as Wood, (2009), Smith (2012) , Desfor, (2012) and Timur, (2013). All have extensively documented the changing relationship between port and city interfaces, the changing socio-economic character of port-cities and highlighted the regeneration opportunities and challenges that have resulted.

Post 2000 there has been less documented evidence with fewer academic evaluations, with notable exceptions being for example (Smith, 2012). Nonetheless the changes in spatial and socio-economic order at many sites continue to present considerable new opportunities for the re-assessment of substantial areas of city docklands and waterfront areas. As already well documented, regeneration ideas and concepts were initially developed in the United States during the 1970s and authors such as Norcliffe in the late 1980s, professed that, over this period, many large North American ports provided the catalyst and development model to diversify traditional port-related uses world wide. These assessments have been more recently evaluated by authors such as Bunce (2007), Brown (2009) and Nehuis (2009) who have studied cases of regeneration across several American cities. To this end the evolving waterfront regeneration 'paradigm' has largely reflected a regeneration strategy that has promoted and increased residential, recreational, tourism,, commercial and associated public land uses, which, in many cases, has often become dominant features. During this period, these newly created urban waterfront environments were often referred to as the **new "Central Waterfront"**. In many instances these first cases provided the basic ingredient or "model" for the regeneration of urban waterfronts globally. Many North American cities embarked upon major dockland and waterfront regeneration initiatives which have not only spanned the east and west coasts with notable examples in San Francisco, Oakland, Seattle, New York, Boston, Baltimore and San Diego but have also seen notable inland initiatives in, for example, Toronto and Chicago.

Elsewhere, particularly in Asia, Europe and the UK the pace was more pragmatic. However despite the slow start, the mid to late 1980s did see a number of major global, Asian, European and UK cities including Sydney, Yokahama, London, Barcelona Copenhagen, Hamburg, Rotterdam, Liverpool, Birmingham and Glasgow and more recently Singapore, Hong Kong and Dubai embarking on ambitious dockland and waterfront regeneration projects which largely demonstrated large scale transformations and regeneration of decaying dockland and waterfront areas.

By the early 1990s waterfront regeneration was clearly a 'mind-set' for developers, local municipalities, development agencies and national governments as the tangible benefits of 'waterfront development' became more apparent. In this respect the revitalisation of waterfronts became synonymous with government urban policy, sustainable development and urban renewal strategies. In many instances the focus on waterfronts through government urban policies also became synonymous with the socio-economic objectives of government policy programmes across the western world.

During the latter decades of the twentieth century waterfront regeneration projects thus became uniquely placed to create new social facilities, expand employment and provide a real foundation for the environmental, economic and social regeneration of many declining urban areas. Nevertheless, as projects grew in scale and complexity, growing concerns were often raised questioning the *raison detre* of many projects. Indeed as several exponents revealed at the time, and more recently, many proved controversial in economic, social and political terms (Desfor, 2012; Smith, 2012). In this context the USA increasingly provided indicators for both success and failure when regenerating waterfronts (Gordon, 1997, Brown, 2009).

The American 'model'

The North American regeneration experience supported by federal government reconstruction initiatives has provided valuable pointers for regeneration around the world. Strong executive powers of the US local authority system, federal government support, and a favorable tax environment encouraged many developers and entrepreneurs to invest in American city dockland areas (Hambleton, 1991; Breen and Rigby, 1996). These ideas were very much transposed to 'globalised' urban policy initiatives which encouraged a 'model' based upon public urban regeneration agencies, a variety and mix of publicly funded regeneration finance and moreover a political focus based on priorities to support economic development (Thornly, 1992). Tunbridge (1988) refers to several additional factors that prompted a general revitalisation of US port-cities which included changing demography; availability of cheap residential property, growing heritage awareness, growing quality of life awareness, the desire to live closer to work, and the growing importance of urban tourism (Tunbridge, 1988). Indeed Tunbridge stated that in absolute terms the USA led the world in the extent of its waterfront revitalisation programme. As a result American waterfront projects primarily focused upon rehabilitation and redevelopment consisting of a broad developmental 'mix' including, public space, residential, recreational, commercial, retail, and service and tourist facilities. This largely became the typical development model or paradigm and shaped the "*regeneration model*" that was to characterise many waterfront development projects in other parts

of the world including Asia, Australasia, Europe and the UK. Essentially residential, recreational and tourist related uses were often the predominant development mix in this model. They included private residences, retail leisure, chiefly of the "*festival market*" type, marinas and other boat related uses. Secondary to this museums, commercial facilities, sport and light industrial uses were often integrated. The total theme, however was very much orientated to residential- leisure which was often enhanced by periodic festivals and special events (Tunbridge, 1988; Norcliffe, 1988; Breen and Rigby, 1996; Marshal, 2001; Falk, 2003).

These factors, led to the many important urban waterfront regeneration schemes that characterised the successful reclamation of derelict waterfronts in many parts of the USA. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss these in detail some of the more influential projects included, The Inner Harbour Baltimore, Quincy Market Boston, The Pierhead Building New York, Seattle's Central Waterfront, San Diego's Waterfront Village and Ghirardelli Square and Fisherman's Wharf San Francisco. (Hoyle et al, 1988). All provided catalysts and influenced regeneration strategies for projects worldwide.

The downturn of the US and world economy during the late 1980's and early 1990's slowed the process of regeneration. Infact several US waterfront regeneration projects during the 1990s, and post 2000 have experienced economic as well as social difficulties. This has notably been primarily in the commercial and retail sectors and where local political accountability and access has been challenged. As early as 1991 Dutton documented a downturn but suggested that in many instances this would not be a particularly serious problem if developments adhered to certain development criteria. These he surmised were largely related to three key areas, notably; i) the extent to which commercial uses were diversified; ii) the extent to which tourism development was catered for; and iii) the extent to which high environmental excellence was achieved (Dutton, 1991). Similar problems at the time were reported by Winterbottom (1989), Suttles (1991) and Breen and Rigby (1990) and have been repeated more recently by concerns expressed on waterfront projects in Cleveland, Chicago, New York and Toronto by UDC (2001) and Levick (2004). More contemporary assessments on specific cases such as Buffalo, by for example, Bunce (2007), Brown (2009), Nyhuis (2009) and Desfor (2012) have also concluded similar experiences which have provided cautionary lessons for the future sustainability of waterfront projects.

Global Waterfront Regeneration

Waterfront and dockland renewal projects outside the USA and particularly in Asia, Europe and the UK have been generally far more pragmatic. Nevertheless the US experience was a major influence in

orchestrating global, European and British urban regeneration policy developments over the last two decades and as such, American experience did provide the framework for dockland revival across much of the world (DOE, 1988), (ETB, 1988;1989) and (Timur,2013). Outside Europe projects such as Darling Harbour in Sydney, Yokohama Bay in Japan and Lambton Harbour in New Zealand and more recently projects in Singapore, Dubai and Hong Kong became 'disciples' of the American model. At the forefront of European waterfront regeneration were examples such as Barcelona's Waterfront - Ramblas del Mar, Bilbao and the Guggenheim, and Rotterdam's waterfront. Within the UK the London Docklands, was one of the first British examples. However, since the inception of this project in 1981 there have been several other comprehensive waterfront regeneration schemes, some completed and some still in the process of completion. Well established and successful UK projects now include for example, Liverpool's Albert Dock, Cardiff Bay, Gloucester Docks, Bristol Docks, Birmingham's Broad Street, Southampton's ocean Village, the Dockyards of Portsmouth, Glasgow's Clydeside, Salford Quays, London's South Bank, Manchester's Castlefields, Newcastle's Quayside and Sheffield's Canal Basin. In Europe other notable waterfront schemes have been initiated in, for example, Genoa, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Oslo, Rotterdam, Valletta, and Hamburg.

Post 2000: Learning from legacies

The extent, pace and scale of waterfront development projects and associated activities continues to inspire and form a backdrop for many regeneration initiatives. Indeed in 2013, Warman's remarks quoted earlier appear still to hold a certain resonance and meaning from those earlier days back in 1990. At the start of 2013 the concept of 'Waterfront Regeneration' still clearly remains an important agenda and attractive proposition for many developers, planners, architects and visitors alike around the globe. During the last twenty years, or so, the growth and success associated with tourism development has also been exponential and a phenomena without parallel with many waterfront locations creating new city districts or quarters as a basis for new urban tourism and regeneration initiatives. San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf, Bristol's Floating Harbour, Yokohama Bay and Barcelona's waterfront illustrate some of the first examples, which very much reflected this approach. Baltimore's Inner Harbor, Cardiff Bay and Sydney's festival type market/leisure quarter has also reflected this approach. New York, Wellington Lambton Harbour, Capetown's waterfront, Salford Quays, and more recently Singapore's Marina Bay provide other examples. The list is extensive and too long to consider in this paper, however, these examples have not only changed the face of run down city quarters but in more strategic terms have changed the character of many cities and regions and created new or alternative 'City and Tourist destinations'. This, in turn, has provided unprecedented opportunities for new economic development, inward investment and of course branding for new or reinvented city destinations.

As a consequence there is now much evidence to support the arguments for waterfront regeneration and much of this suggests that there are still real returns to be had from investing in water-related projects. These have included: high real estate and property investment returns; socio economic regeneration for inner city communities; the development of new visitor markets; job creation; environmental enhancement; historic conservation; city and regional promotion and improved infrastructure (Desfor, 2012; Smith, 2012).

It would however be naïve to suggest that there are only positive features to waterfront regeneration. Indeed, as far back as 1985 there were growing concerns being expressed in the USA about the direction and focus of waterfront renewal projects. As a result, several key issues have emerged that concern some of the more detailed aspects of waterfront regeneration. These have largely included design and social issues. In design terms problems associated with waterfront 'fashions; commercial exploitation at the expense of community need; problems associated with land use mix; the 'standardisation' of waterfront development schemes; problems of funding; commercial failure and the securing of community space have been key issues. On the social aspects problems with 'political dogma' often 'insisting' on private sector led initiatives and problems associated with social conflict especially between indigenous community groups and new development appear to be common concerns (Fisher,1997), (Gordon, 1997), (Dovey, 2004) and (Jones, 2007). In a similar vein more contemporary assessments using American, Japanese and Turkish cases, Bunce (2007), Beezmez (2008), Wood (2009) and Sasaki (2010) also highlight some of the political and social consequences and challenges created by waterfront regeneration projects.

Lessons from the past

Evidence to evaluate waterfront regeneration projects is now both extensive but disparate. Research has tended to centre on the scale and commercial success generated by new projects. In some, the impact developments have had upon the social and physical environments in which they are placed have also been assessed, for example, by Brookes (1988), Gordon, (1997), Levick (2004) and Dovey (2004) and more recently by Smith (2012). There is much evidence that predates 2000 but much less so post this date, perhaps illustrating less interest in the subject matter or a focus on other urban issues. Nonetheless despite the recent dearth in contemporary literature the scale of, and number of waterfront projects remains impressive. Much existing data implies or suggests that there are still real returns to be had from investing in water-related projects. There are several sources of literature that outline the advantages that such waterfront regeneration projects can offer to an area in decline. For example research by (MSI, 1990), (Meyer, 2000), (Marshall, 2001), (Falk, 2003) and (Urban Land Institute, 2004) have certainly

provided a framework for some of the more positive outcomes as well as highlighting some of the more pressing challenges. With this in mind, it is clear that there are many tangible, although usually fiscal, benefits that waterfront regeneration projects have made. Some of the more pronounced advantages have included;

- *Higher real estate values.*
- *Increased visitor expenditure*
- *the upgrade of poor inner city environments*
- *clearance of derelict land*
- *More effective and sustainable use of urban resources.*
- *The conservation and re-use of historic buildings and local heritage.*
- *Pollution control*
- *Improved public access.*
- *Improved public space*
- *Improved inward investment and tourism.*
- *Improved social and community provision.*

Together with these benefits there have also been concerns expressed that pressure, particularly from, private and public developers has often led to the short term exploitation and over-development of some city waterfronts, with little or no provision for environmental and social safeguards. In a similar vein several conflicts have also emerged which highlight several challenges that have confronted many waterfront regeneration projects. These too, for example have included:

- *Problems associated with reductions in waterfront project funding.*
- *The loss of waterfront character.*
- *The difficulties associated with private sector interests competing with public access needs*
- *The removal of traditional working and living waterfront practices*
- *Commercial failure*
- *The over reliance on the public provision of infrastructure*
- *Environmental damage*
- *Social exclusion*
- *Gentrification*

Other authors have also raised concerns on these lines which often highlight emerging conflicts between profit orientated development and interrelated concerns for social equity, heritage and conservation (Falk, 2003 & Smith, 2012).

Hambleton's earlier interpretations of such problems (1990/1991) indicated that existing evidence pointed to the domination of the private sector with deprived or community groups gaining little or

nothing from the regeneration process. As an interesting social insight and lesson, his review of Levine's work showed that many down-town developments, taking Baltimore as an example, have helped to create a dual city of "haves" and "have nots". As a consequence he implied that city neighbourhoods had continued to deteriorate and, for local communities, public interest had been unable to secure, quality employment and city public space. He surmised that regeneration interests had largely been restructured to meet the various interests of developers, tourists and upper income consumers (Hambleton, 1991). Falk (2003), Desfor (2012) and Smith (2012) have also expressed more contemporary analysis and conclusions in similar terms.

Indeed, findings such as these are paralleled with concerns now being voiced within general debates and agendas on regeneration in broader terms. Carta's work on the 'fluid' and 'creative' City (2007) and the need for more inclusive, better integrated regeneration objectives is a case in point. In this respect there has certainly been growing concerns related to large dockland regeneration schemes, especially issues that have raised concern regarding the misdirection of public funding and regeneration strategies. Developments in places such as London, Cardiff, Barcelona, Baltimore and New York have taken much criticism. These have often related to fundamental problems associated with design quality, public accessibility, gentrification, public utility provision and social policy decisions. These are now well documented and have led at broader national and international debates on waterfronts that increasingly question broader regeneration strategies and objectives. Again it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a detailed critique of these growing issues but clearly there are fundamental issues at stake. In this context criticisms over the last decade have been aimed largely at the lack of democratic accountability; ad hoc public funding; problems with social equity; under-representation of local community interests and major environmental concerns. Questions have also been raised on the effectiveness of those responsible for regeneration in bringing about comprehensive and inclusive urban regeneration that fully embraces political, social and environmental objectives (Falk, 2003), (Smith, 2012).

Pointers for the future

The issues of waterfront regeneration including questions concerning the problems associated with regeneration panaceas, design paradigms, public facility provision private/public sector partnerships and broader concerns between economic and social objectives are now widely known. It is clear that development strategies should increasingly rely on a balanced economic and social provision of facilities and ensure that future strategies concentrate upon public sector/private sector partnership which secures the integration of appropriate waterfront related uses. In this context the regeneration 'model' adopted or applied and the extent to which public/private sector partnerships are encouraged is critical.

Lessons also suggest that there is need to establish clear public sector and private sector objectives prior to implementing projects. Without such objectives waterfront regeneration projects, will, in many instances, suffer from short term policies that secure economic development rather than longer term policies that aim to rehabilitate often run down urban areas and docklands for all stakeholders concerned. As a consequence it has become increasingly important to ensure that all such projects are considered as part of a broader comprehensive regeneration strategy which embraces economic, environmental, cultural and social objectives which aim to achieve well balanced, inclusive and integrated policies for the future prosperity of such areas. Several examples of successful schemes have evolved over last two decades. They often tend to be smaller scale than the more prestigious developments and in contrast are often a combination of private and public sector partnership. For example in the USA they include examples such as The Minneapolis Riverfront District, Oakland Waterfront Trail, Beerline Neighbourhood Milwaukee, Hudson River Park New York and in the UK examples such as London's South Bank, Gloucester Docks and Swansea's Maritime District. Indeed it is now interesting to see that in the USA annual award prizes for 'excellence on the waterfront' highlight innovative waterfront regeneration by using criteria such as best environmental protection and enhancement, best historic preservation and adaptive use, best parks and recreation and best neighbourhood (Waterfront Center, 2004).

European states have usually reflected this more publicly spirited approach to regeneration often using these approaches. As an example, Spain has been a major lead player in this respect. The rehabilitation of Barcelona in Catalunya has been much praised for its ambitious and innovative plans. The reclamation of substantial waterfront areas for public open space and other leisure orientated activities has played a large part in this regeneration process. The Olympic Games, hosted in the city in 1992 were obviously the catalyst for this regeneration. The 1995 planning exhibition titled "*La Ciutat De la Gent*" (City Of The People) set the agenda in this respect and has become a leading influence ever since. At the forefront of this was the construction of La Rambla Del Mar (Street of The Sea) a major new waterfront walkway and leisure area for the city. In broader European terms, the objectives and aims of the Barcelona experience fit well with the policy for future regeneration strategies. It is perhaps such examples that are small scale and largely publicly orientated, as well as innovative and visionary that will provide key lessons for the new waterfront regeneration paradigm.

The picture painted post 2000 suggests that waterfront development strategies should draw from lessons of the 1980s and 1990s by ensuring that a balance is met between economic and social provision of facilities and that partnerships between 'stakeholder' groups are encouraged and supported. In this

context the **waterfront** regeneration 'paradigm or model' adopted or applied and the extent to which public/private sector partnerships are encouraged is critical. Key success indicators such as 'Fusion and Diversification' – 'Capacity Building' – 'The Public Realm' – 'Innovation & Vision' – 'Creativity' – 'Sustainability' - 'Connectivity' –'Quality' – 'Leadership' – Social Equity' have clearly set the agenda for the measurement of success. It would appear that without such objectives being met waterfront regeneration projects still risk becoming short term solutions to broader economic development objectives rather than longer term initiatives that aim to rehabilitate often run down inner city areas and waterfronts. Nevertheless it is encouraging to see that more publicly spirited approaches or models are being increasingly adopted as the template for the more recent and future regeneration projects. It is a model that embraces both the benefits of the more commercially orientated American examples together with the more publicly spirited approach of regeneration that is seen within Continental Europe and elsewhere. These were sentiments expressed by URBED's (2003) assessment on the future of waterfronts which highlighted the criteria for successful regeneration which are still pertinent ten years on in 2013. They included for example such criteria as creating a spirit of place, providing a cared for public realm, respecting the past, integration with surrounding areas, community attractions, being resourceful and utilizing waterfront resources to the full (Falk, 2003). See Fig 1 : (in here somewhere)

Figure 1: Conceptualising the future for waterfront regeneration

Mid-way through 2013 it is optimistic to see that the urban regeneration debates of the 1980s, 1990s and post 2000 and the political controversies that were apparent during this period have now largely been off set by more positive and inclusive approaches that embrace this all-encompassing model. With respect to this, there now appears to be a more general acceptance toward innovative, more focused and specialised policy alternatives for regenerating waterfront and inner city areas. Significantly, Government and academics alike are now increasingly recognising the importance and contribution that urban design, leisure and tourism and cultural regeneration can contribute to the growth of cities and their associated waterfronts. In this respect, contemporary urban initiatives have more recently started to focus on culture and cultural regeneration, creativity, vision and innovation increasingly funded through less traditional government sources and more private sector involvement.

Such initiatives have involved the development of locally based innovation and cultural strategies in partnership with local municipalities which are increasingly turning to ‘*cultural resources*’ and ‘*small business*’ operations to both stimulate new economic activity and to aid physical regeneration of urban environments, waterfronts and communities. Linkages with traditional city and urban functions are also being explored more comprehensively with better integration of regeneration projects with broader urban planning and city- wide objectives. For example the recent regeneration of South Boston’s Innovation District based upon encouraging a mix of new ‘start up’ innovation business opportunities has been a relatively new departure from the more traditional waterfront regeneration paradigms (The Economist, 2013). In the UK cities such as Swansea with a focus on its new waterfront and maritime cultural strategy is also an example of changing priorities. The City of Valletta in Malta, which is currently focusing much of its new waterfront regeneration strategy on Valletta V18 - The European Cultural Capital in 2018, which prioritises building cultural capacity . In a similar context the Municipalities of Palermo and Trapani in Sicily, Italy also provide a new cultural focus to waterfront regeneration. From these examples, the lessons are clear. The future success of waterfront regeneration strategies will be increasingly tied to a development paradigm which reflects a more prescribed development criteria and one which encourages inclusivity, mixed and innovative projects that promote good planning, visionary design concepts, cultural sensitivity, connectivity, sustainable financing and appropriate development scale. All these attributes provide the basis from which urban waterfront initiatives can successfully be used as prime micro-market methods for the wider regeneration that will benefit a city’s future economic, social and cultural growth. Torre in 1989 aptly summed up the general feeling of the time by stating that “*It is the lure of water, its spells, its reflection, its endless movement and change, that best captures man’s imagination and provides a variety of applications from business to recreation, from calm to passive activities, the water’s edge is where life is most diverse and unique*” (Torre, 1989: 4). It is a notion that still captures imagination and inspiration and stimulates an impetus for the continued revitalization of waterfronts and their associated communities across the world today. Clearly innovation, vision, community and culture would appear to be on the ‘regeneration’ ascendancy in the respect.

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Figure 1:

