Internationale Villes et Ports in Le Havre are three examples. These networks produce their own publications and hold their own conferences. An indication of how "competitive" this industry has become is that on the same weekend in October of 1999 three waterfront conferences occurred in North America alone. These were "Waterfronts in Post-Industrial Cities," held in Cambridge by the Harvard Graduate School of Design; "Urban Waterfronts 17," held in Charleston by the Waterfront Center, and "Worldwide Urban Waterfronts," held in Vancouver by Baltic Conventions from the United Kingdom.

The urban waterfront tells us many things about the way we make, and think about, cities. Projects such as the London Docklands are examples of how planning and design intentions are subverted by the concerns of power and capital (Malone, 1996: 15). Sydney's Darling Harbour is an example of a politically driven project that circumvented city and state regulatory systems to satisfy political agendas. Some have described the project as an "ill conceived insertion of gigantic new developments" into the fabric of the city (Morrison, 1991:4). Amsterdam's Ij-Oevers project is an example of a project that speculated heavily on global financial growth, which did not eventuate. Such projects teach us about the volatility of markets and global capital. They also teach us about the nature of building cities and how to plan for their construction. Projects such as Boston's Fan Pier or Melbourne's Docklands are current manifestations that deal with issues of public access and the appropriate mix of uses on privileged waterfront sites.

Large waterfront redevelopment projects often circumvent regulatory systems, and can be so insular as to deny the existence of the context into which they insert themselves. They reside in a self-imposed vacuum. However, their presence often puts pressure on existing infrastructure, on highways, and road systems. The availability of new tracts of very large land allows for programs, often at odds with the scale and grain of the traditional city, to find places to locate. These are the sites for big program facilities such as museums, exhibition halls, convention centers and sports stadiums.

There is a tendency, in much of the literature, to view waterfronts as a kind of urban panacea, a cure-all for ailing cities in search of new self-images or ways of dealing with issues of competition for capital developments or tourist dollars. The waterfront redevelopment project has became synonymous with visions of exuberance. Images of Baltimore's Inner Harbor, or of Sydney's Darling Harbour (or any number of others), filled with joyous masses, inspired city officials and urban planners around the world and led to a rash of "festival marketplaces." However, the focus on the end-product of waterfront development ignores the problems, and possibilities, faced by cities as they work to create them. The idea of project-as-product combined with the spread of "architectural capital" has led to situations where international design clichés characterize the waterfronts of Boston, Tokyo and Dublin (Malone, 1996: 263). The result is a kind of rubber-stamping of the "successful" waterfront magic, often with limited results.

This type of thinking deals with such developments removed from the political structures and financial mechanisms that are fundamental to their