

# 10 History at the water's edge

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## Introduction

Ideas in planning and architecture have traditionally taken around thirty years to go from being radical and experimental to becoming the accepted norm, from being argued in political, professional and academic institutions to becoming the textbook methodology. The first stage in the process belongs to the visionaries able to offer new insight that somehow captures the *Zeitgeist*. They are followed at the second stage by the developers who expand the idea, often finding a broader application. During the third stage the idea is so widely accepted that it becomes standard practice. At this point of general recognition the idea is often discarded or radically altered by a new generation who, through hindsight and analysis, are once again able to respond to further change in an original way. Baltimore Inner Harbor was the largest of this first generation of waterfront redevelopments. It was followed by two rapid and overlapping generations of development that also saw the ideas taken up internationally. The fourth generation of rethinkers should now be emerging.

The popularity of waterfront development owes much to the fact that virtually every city has a downtown waterfront that offers a mix of scales and uses close to the center, offering an urban quality while at the same time providing new development opportunity. Water, the primary human resource, was the reason for the original location, providing means of transport, defense, leisure and recreation. But it was not just the physical form of the old harbors that influenced so much subsequent planning. Old industries had gathered on land that was not wanted and was cheap. There is also an emotive link with historical development that shaped so many lives and influenced the culture of cities. The fact that most industrial cities had turned their backs on their waterfronts for so long meant there was an element of rediscovery and emotional re-engagement. This first generation of waterfront transformations succeeded because they changed the problem scenario of redundant waterfront industry into one of opportunity.

Growing wealth, growing populations and increased leisure time enabled a new generation of leisure-oriented developments, often using