

have been at least in part inspired by Boston's earlier waterfront successes?

As presentations of each city's waterfront-related plans or accomplishments proceeded some considerable overlap in sensibilities emerged. Despite great differences in location, city size, rates of growth, and, of course, the uniqueness of each society, these waterfront cities seemed to share the following conclusions/insights:

Along its waterfront, the aura of a city resides and persists

There is an enduring, even eternal, dimension to a city's waterfront as it bears witness – and often takes the brunt – of the ebbs and flows of a city's prosperity. Consider Shanghai. While Rome was not built in a day, it appears that Shanghai is determined to prove that it can be done. In a little over a century Shanghai has grown from a large fishing village to a megalopolis expected soon to reach twenty million people. The full ferocity of this barely imaginable rate of growth is being borne today. While Americans worry about sprawl, Shanghai seems to be building Manhattan and Los Angeles one on top of another. The Shanghai delegation at the conference described that, incredibly, 3,000 kilometers of elevated highways will be built in the metropolitan area over the next decade! With pride and without expressed sentimentality for the "good old days," so common today in the West, the delegation asserted that the transportation problem of the metropolis will be so solved.

Amidst such confidence for handling massive change can the DNA of the old fishing village survive, much less maintain relevance? Professor Zheng Shiling, vice-president of Tongji University, answered affirmatively as his colleagues presented a plan to reorient modern cosmopolitan Shanghai to its ancient river, the Huangpu, and to clean up its principal tributary, Suzhou Creek. While there will be many future highways, he said, there will only be one river. Precisely because everything in Shanghai is currently in flux, the re-commitment to its river is vital – and culturally reassuring. After all, Zheng Shiling concluded, "water reflects the morality and wisdom of our nationality." Such near mystical associations are not unique to Asian cultures and are valuable for waterfront planning anywhere.

Sure of their river as a stabilizing and enduring force and urban amenity, and welcoming modernization and growth, the planners in Shanghai are less concerned about precisely determining the most appropriate scale and uses along the river. In Boston, to the contrary, the general unease about the impact of further growth leads to a belief that certain uses, such as commercial office space and scale of construction (tall buildings), will forever damage a proper relationship of city to harbor. If Shanghai is too casual about development impacts, Bostonians may at the moment be too cautious about what constitutes proper waterfront development.