

cultural project, the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum. Now they are pursuing more conventional redevelopment efforts. Josu Bergara Etxebarria, the President of the Provincial Council of Bizkaia, spoke about the strategic goal of using culture as a tool for development, not just real estate development itself. The lesson here is that to compete globally may involve recasting, in some instances, rather than more narrowly preserving, a city's waterfront image.

Having achieved such recasting several times in its history, Bostonians have none the less approached the future of the Seaport District with quite conservative ambitions. The popular local imagination seems to prefer another Back Bay over visions of more innovative, future-oriented urban contexts. Unfortunately, the conditions under which the Back Bay was realized – incremental, block-by-block and house-by-house growth in which the public financed all services and the infrastructure, not to mention constructed the land – are not easily replicated today. But how to achieve similar results?

To make waterfronts come alive (after industry has receded) they must become places for people to dwell not just visit or recreate

Lord Mayor Sartor of Sydney spoke of the importance of maintaining a “living city” even as pressure to yield to financially more lucrative commercial development grows along thriving waterfronts. But the most impassioned support for housing at the water's edge was made by the Vancouver delegation whose “Living First” slogan hammered home the idea that residents are as important to cities as anything else. Some of the international participants may have thought this too obvious a point. Yet, taken within a North American context, where industrial-era cities have been shedding population to their suburban peripheries for half a century, it is a crucial insight. Starting in the 1980s Vancouver began the transformation of its many downtown waterfronts from industrial and rail uses with the goal of adding as many as 25,000 mid-to-high-density housing units, and by the century's end Vancouver was well on the way to achieving this goal.

The city's planning director, Larry Beasley, spoke of using waterfront locations to create a competitive advantage for downtown living against the allures of the suburbs. He called density, congestion and even high-rise housing “our friends” in creating lively, mixed-use urban lifestyles. He noted the city's adamant refusal to upgrade its highway system specifically to make it harder for people to commute from the periphery, thereby inducing them to select in-town housing. Until recently such talk would have seemed sheer lunacy in most American cities, and perhaps for many sound improbable still. Yet to experience Vancouver today is to understand what “living first” means: housing has here created demand for virtually everything else: new services, shopping and entertainment, public transportation, and open space.

The city as a place to dwell has been one of Boston's secrets too. Creating great places to live in the heart of Boston and Vancouver is held to be an early priority, not a later consequence of other actions. Curiously then,