

there is a recent concern in the emerging Seaport District that planning for much housing will crowd out other uses and privatize the waterfront. Those so concerned do not know their own city's history, or overlook that Boston's most urbane nineteenth-century accomplishment was to create the marvelous residential neighborhood of Back Bay, and as a consequence eventually gain a great public waterfront along the Charles River. Again, along its oldest waterfront at mid-twentieth century, Bostonians pioneered the American experience of adapting historic but abandoned maritime structures for residential uses. One can devise regulations against building massively, against the casting of undue shadows and loss of public access, but, in all but the most extreme circumstances of density (or incompatibility with still vital industrial uses), having more people living in the proximity of the waterfront is a long-term competitive advantage for a city. Rapacious users of land, as Americans unfortunately are, worry that only one thing may fit, but far more frequently than is assumed many uses can coexist side by side – especially across 700 acres of land.

Geography may be a significant road to and antidote from globalization

It was known for centuries as "Genoa the Superb," not because of its leading role in the seafaring culture of the Mediterranean but for its unforgettable silhouette as seen from the sea. The amphitheater-like form of the harbor appears carved from the coastal mountains, which in turn seem to emerge straight from the sea. While the historic harbor is no longer adequate in size for modern cargo shipping, its shape is even more powerful as a focusing device – like a centripetal force orienting the entire city to the old harbor. This condition of centering proved very useful as the city began to reinvent itself as a cultural and tourist destination in anticipation of the world-wide commemoration of the 500th anniversary of Columbus's discovery of America. In a prior epoch, geography enabled a well-scaled, well-protected port. Today it facilitates a diverse and spatially contained realm of contemporary businesses, institutional, residential and visitor facilities all in view of and surrounded by the layers of Genoa's prior lives.

Likewise, visits to Amsterdam, Sydney, or Vancouver – indeed, to many cities located on major bodies of water – leave indelible images of place. The value of these proverbial postcard views is not to be dismissed. As we begin the new century "globalization" represents, on the one hand, an ideal to reach (for cities and nations seeking access to the global economy) and, on the other, embarking on a road risking homogenization of culture and the loss of local identity. A memorable geography uniquely reinforced by a special pattern of urbanization can address both the ideal and the concern. A memorable setting can help attract global markets while forestalling the "this could be anywhere" syndrome of much current urban development. Just about every waterfront city should aspire to be called superb.

Perhaps unexpectedly, this is a greater challenge for Boston's Seaport District than in many cities. The original landfill created a rather featureless, very flat land form, far less dramatic than the contours of the South