

of a long and decisive era – namely, the growth of industry. Instead, they realize that sustaining this solution for continuity must be interpreted in a positive sense, as an opportunity for re-launching the urban economy, for trying out new objectives and new challenges. The story of the waterfront is thus to be found in this framework, this context of events and intentions, and I therefore feel that the waterfront should be interpreted as an essential paradigm of the post-industrial city.

The waterfront as an unusual outcome of the post-industrial city

While the vast abandoned industrial areas are the most visible and concrete testimony of the effects of an era that is coming to an end, we must remember that another, equally obvious, emblem of this transition are the events of the port areas which, convulsed by the revolution in maritime transport with the introduction of containers, have radically altered their set-ups: the ports have “freed” the parts more closely tied to the urban fabric, and have acquired new spaces, more peripheral and accessible from the hinterland. Many waterfront zones are or have been port zones, and interesting and obvious features can still be seen. Thus the end of the process of industrial growth, or rather its new course, is mainly characterized by a lack of need to use new areas (a difficult thing in any case in territory that is all but urbanized), but instead to exploit spaces and equipment that date back to the first industrial period: the main theme becomes that of recovering this heritage, affording it increased weight in policies of urban development as a resource to be upgraded rather than as an imposing and cumbersome inheritance of the past. In this sense re-launching the waterfront is one of the most significant chapters in these policies, as this urban zone, in direct contact with the water, has the same objectives as the old and abandoned industrial areas redesigned by the city; namely, the same three guidelines: “recomposition,” “regeneration” and “recovery.”

The first – “recomposition” – means that those in charge of the waterfront projects concentrate above all on giving a common unitary sense to the different parts – both physical and functional – which make up the areas (for example there are different sectors – often isolated from each other and non-communicative – that constitute the port areas in the very heart of the city, with spaces for commercial activities and storage completely separate from those destined for passengers). Therefore, the first clear outcome of these operations is the work of “re-joining” these parts and activating a new “character,” one that can keep the different elements together while also furnishing an unusual and attractive image for future users.

“Regeneration” could also be seen as central to waterfront work, as it entails re-examining and revitalizing urban zones that are of a considerable size and often located a short distance from the city center. Whether these urban zones be former port areas or used for other purposes, whether the reused areas be empty or devoid of function, there can be no doubt concerning the strategic importance of this upgrading. The outcome is reintroduction into “urban play,” with an increase in value, a considerable stock