

3.2 View toward the Utopia Pavilion at the Lisbon Expo'98 site.



but a few examples and leaving aside the well-known cases of the London Docklands or Port Vell in Barcelona. It is a phenomenon which is already observable and which has recurrent features (though with several variations), together with unusual features, linked to the individual sites and local traditions. However, there is no doubt that this strategy was conceived, promoted, became popular and was consolidated on the North American continent – in the United States in particular – and became a “model” that was successively exported to the rest of the world from Europe to Japan and Australia. This was the first model of regeneration for urban-port waterfront areas entailing the conception of the renewal of the waterfront zone. The celebrated cases of Baltimore and Boston both enclosed the seeds of a new operation, which will certainly take on specific and distinctive tones from time to time and give rise to a vast range of outcomes; twenty-five years on the Baltimore and Boston cases are akin to a sort of “big bang” in waterfront redevelopment, a start – for many cities – of a new and powerful phase of urban reorganization.

The waterfront, a paradigm of urban complexity

On observing the main waterfront projects in detail, it is clear that one of the essential elements is the co-presence of numerous activities which, combined in different percentages depending on the cases, give life to new “pieces” of city, sometimes marked by an interesting feature entailing complexity. Complexity is a quality that distinguishes the more complete, articulated urban organisms. It is often the outcome of long processes involving successive historic phases and projects implemented in these phases; from this viewpoint, the complexity of the city is a product of intelligent and continuous work of construction, often over many centuries. However, complexity can also be the result of a single project, with different shades of importance, over the span of a matter of years – the result of a partial operation from one “sector” rather than a “general” planning act.

Careful examination reveals that the contemporary city often exhibits different qualities over different periods, in terms of construction: at times