Wastelands at Port-City Interfaces. The Search for Water Spaces to Evade the Constant Hustle and Bustle of City Life

Kristel Mazy

Abstract Port-city interfaces, near urban centers, are under intense land pressure within the context of increased competition for the development of these sites. Some interfaces are wastelands, induced by the remoteness of port installations from urban centers. For other interfaces, the word "wasteland" can be instrumentalized by planners to reallocate underused, yet active, port spaces. This paper aims to highlight the points of view of users, mostly inhabitants of these neighborhoods, in Brussels and Lille, based on a study of territorial representations. This study shows that these representations are clearly different from the conflictual environment of decision-making. The representation of a "quiet space" and a "breathing, natural space," for leisure and relaxation, dominates the discourse of users. These representations make sense in very densely built environments, which are landlocked by the passage of major transport infrastructures. This desire for temporary withdrawal can be related to moments allowing daily pressures to be relieved. The development of port-city interfaces as true interstitial breathing spaces within urbanized spaces could be explored for planners.

Keywords Port-city interfaces · Inland waterways · Dense built environment · Territorial representations · Feelings of nature

1 Introduction

Along the waterside, port-city interfaces offer many different types of landscapes. They can be industrial, urban, natural, hybrid, and can even be left or mutated for other purposes. This hybridization attests to a shift that tends to place these spaces in the spotlight of different private and public strategies. Deindustrialization has in fact left behind a difficult socioeconomic situation in Northwest Europe, which is crossed by a network of rivers. This is a sensitive environment which is particularly

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at risk of flooding and pollution, and which has a significant number of wastelands or brownfields.

This article aims to give an overview of the role of these designed areas from the points of view of both their creators and their users.

First, I will focus on putting the subject into context by introducing the port-city relationship from a geohistorical approach. I will then look at the process of creation of wastelands, within the conversion process of port areas. Today, occupancy rates of port-city interfaces can vary significantly, from being very active to under-occupied, or wasteland. Some port areas actually never become wasteland, which can be foreseen or anticipated by planning bodies. Through three Brussels and Lille case studies, I will outline the physical particularities of these areas, which are densely built and isolated by transport infrastructures.

Further in the analysis, I will highlight the territorial representations of these lands, which are crossed by a waterway between the city and the port. Using a qualitative research method based on interviews to study the representations, I have used thematic analysis as a method of content analysis. From the conception and decisional viewpoints, these *designed* spaces are evidence of strong competition regarding the use of the ground between urban and port stakeholders. The idea of wasteland was raised by the developers to reallocate underused port areas that were still active to speed up the conversion process. On the other hand, from the users' point of view, these areas of life are represented as peaceful and breathing sites that can stimulate the senses as well as the imagination. Even though they are far from being natural landscapes, they do share some features which closely resemble nature. The recognition of the role of these interstitial breathing spaces, sparsely dense, within urbanized spaces in dense urban environments as a secondary function for ports could open avenues of reflection for urban planning.

2 Obsolescence and Conversion of Sea-Port Areas

2.1 Origin of Port and Industrial Wastelands

Port and infrastructure wastelands are the results of the gradual disconnection between a city and its port (Bird 1963; Hoyle 1989; Hall 2012). This started in the medieval era in the oldest European cities, and this disconnection has been increasing since the Industrial Revolution.

Ports have gradually moved away from the urban center thanks to two, often simultaneous forces: technological port priorities (brought about by new property needs and proximity with new, higher performance transportation infrastructures) and/or property and real estate resulting from the urban development. These two factors involve different levels of analysis. Centripetal forces are linked with the process of urban conglomeration. Conversely, on a larger scale—in the urban area—centrifugal forces push the more common functions, like logistics or transportation

activities, toward the suburbs to maintain high added-value activities in the city center. These, therefore, contribute to the dispersal of activities within the suburbs (Fremont 2011, p. 2).

From the second half of the twentieth century, this split intensified in Western cities with the instigation of technological evolutions, such as containerization, and the desire for proximity to highways, the new transportation mode providing flexible solutions to the new economic requirements of the "just-in-time" phenomenon. During the deindustrialization period, competition between emerging countries, coupled with the transfer of production plants to the suburbs and the development of service industries within city centers, led to the formation of industrial wastelands.

These rapid changes made some facilities obsolete, whereas others located farther from the city, such as container terminals, remained useful. Sometimes signs of decline, sometimes signs of unsuitability, some interfaces tended to be abandoned, and, in some cases, became wastelands under the influence of the separation of ports from cities.

From the Brussels and Lille cases, I establish the sequence of the evolution of the city-river port relationship, according to a geohistorical approach. First, through observations of historical maps, I identified successive developments that not only changed both the relationship between the city and its port but also between the city and its waterway. On this basis, I have produced synthetic maps (Mazy 2014). They show, for each period, the extension of urbanization and the main urban changes affecting the waterway and associated practices (establishment of craft trades, port facilities, etc.). Through schematic sequences, these synthetic maps enabled me to draw the evolution of the city-port relationship, based on the cases of Brussels and Lille (Fig. 1).

2.2 Obliteration of the Wasteland Phase

In this context of port-city disconnection, waterfronts have become spaces that are subject to strong property tensions. This is especially the case within the framework of urban projects that contributed to their conversion and to a decrease in their industrial function (Prelorenzo 1999). Conversion zones do not only concern abandoned areas.

> Riverbank areas that are in high demand do not go through the wasteland stage. Sometimes, the reuse anticipates an obsolescence that has not yet been confirmed (Chaline 1988, p. 8).

This rapid conversion of port lands, sometimes eliminating the wasteland phase, can be explained by two factors which, from the 1950s, placed waterfronts at the center of urban strategies aiming to revitalize maritime cities.

The first factor is related to the political will bring back city dwellers to damaged central districts following deindustrialization:

> This way, the reorganization of the interface comes as a means to refocus the urban area to compensate a certain splitting and dispersion of the demographic streams, due to urban sprawl. It can allow some centrality to emerge regarding new functions which better match

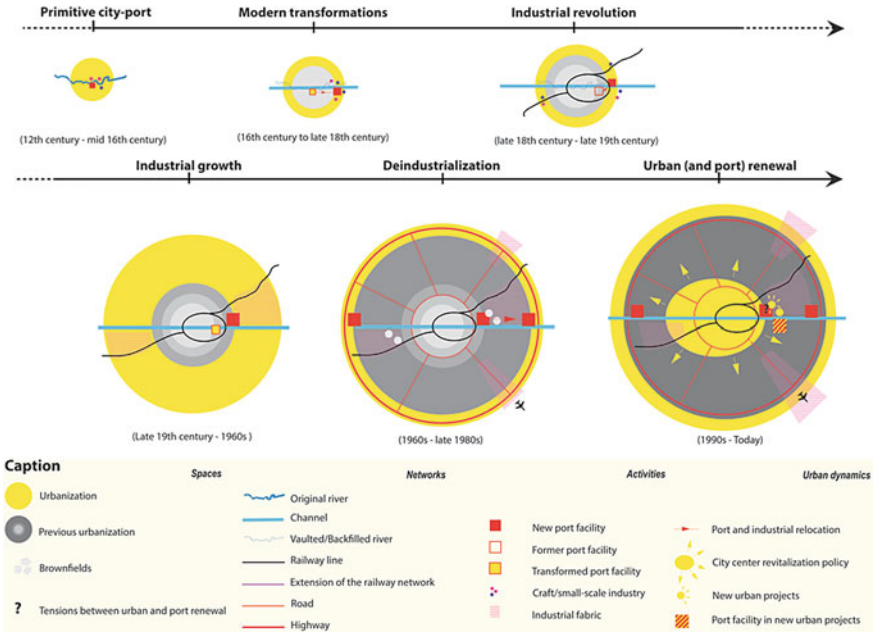

Fig. 1 Schematic evolution of the relationship between inland ports and cities (Mazy 2014)

> the new urban dimensions, since traditional city centers are no longer adapted to this role of urban conglomeration center (Boubacha et al. 1997, p. 18).

The second factor is a necessary precondition to the revitalization of coastal municipalities. This comes from the context of political decentralization that gives more initiative back to the cities.

> People from city centers that were neglected by ports suddenly emerge as major property opportunities in the politics of "urban recapture" that is part of most elected representatives' discourses. Local governments ask that "urban ports" be given back to the city. During the '80s, the will to re-establish a direct relationship with quays confiscated for a long time by the port authority was necessary to the promotion of the coastal city's image (Baudouin and Collin 1996, p. 25).

With the London experience as a flagship project, the construction concepts of the waterfronts quickly spread to fluvial port cities. From the 1980s, rivers and canals became vehicles for projects in numerous cities based on them and their estuary ports, like Bilbao, Hamburg, Nantes, and Bordeaux. This also applied to internal port cities, such as Paris, Lyon, and, more recently, Lille and Brussels. Often, and for many of these cities, the rediscovery of the river became an urban issue in a context of internationalization (Bétin and Cottet-Dumoulin 1999, p. 118). This growing interest in canals and their influence on territory planning led B. Le Sueur to invent the neologism *flurbanization.*

> In response to the fluvial exodus that took workers away from the rivers, our contemporaries tended to come back to the watersides as they lacked urban nature and leisure spaces. If we compare this move to the one that affected the rural world years ago, I could easily talk of *flurbanization* that slowly spreads in harmony. Canals then became a factor of economic balance again, carrying memory and identity (Le Sueur 1997, p. 203).

The spread of concepts of the conversion of *waterfronts* in coastal port cities, along with the growing stakes of the attractiveness of cities requiring internationalization in a context of territorial competition, is pushing fluvial cities to speed up the conversion sequences of port areas that are close to urban centers.

2.3 Port-City Interfaces: Splits in Cities?

Currently, port-city interfaces contain wastelands, industrial or port activity areas, which are sometimes underused or very active, and future urban project areas. I took a deeper look into three case studies that show the diversity of these occupation levels: the Biestebroeck and Vergote reservoirs in Brussels, and the area near the port of Lille.

Close to urban centers, the developed areas that surround the three sites show a very high density. Orthophotos (Fig. 2) reveal a very tight urban network that comes mainly from the industrial Golden Age at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century. Additionally, perception of the density is strengthened by the enclaving of these areas between the transportation infrastructures that were used, or that are still being used, to transport merchandise. Varying from one case to another, the urban barriers are shaped by the canal, the railway network, the metropolitan roads, and even highways. In some cases, embankments not only isolate port activities from their visual and sound pollution, but also increase their isolation among other urban functions. In addition, the density is also exacerbated by the high mineral characteristics of these areas, which provide few open and green public spaces.

We will see that social tensions stemming from negotiations concerning the organization of these port-city areas are based on spatial objects that are subject to tensions through their own physical structure. However, the canal, the ponds, and the port fabric stand out from these dense—or even oppressive—environments, offering a breath of air and empty spaces among the constructed masses of the districts. Indeed, a common feature provided by the three case studies, and inland port docks more generally, is that they are sparsely built to receive materials for storage (mainly construction materials, oil tanks, and logistical activities), delivered by ships. Another common feature of these port spaces is that they are mainly mineral, made of concrete docks, though spontaneous vegetation grows on neglected or "waiting" space. And all of these spaces are open to the waterway. These common characteristics make these spaces singular in cities. For example, a zoom in on the Biestebroeck Reservoir shows these sparse, mineral spaces, along the waterway (Fig. 3). While the morphological characteristics of the three sites are mainly similar, some nuances appear linked to the type of materials stored, the typology and age of warehouses, the width

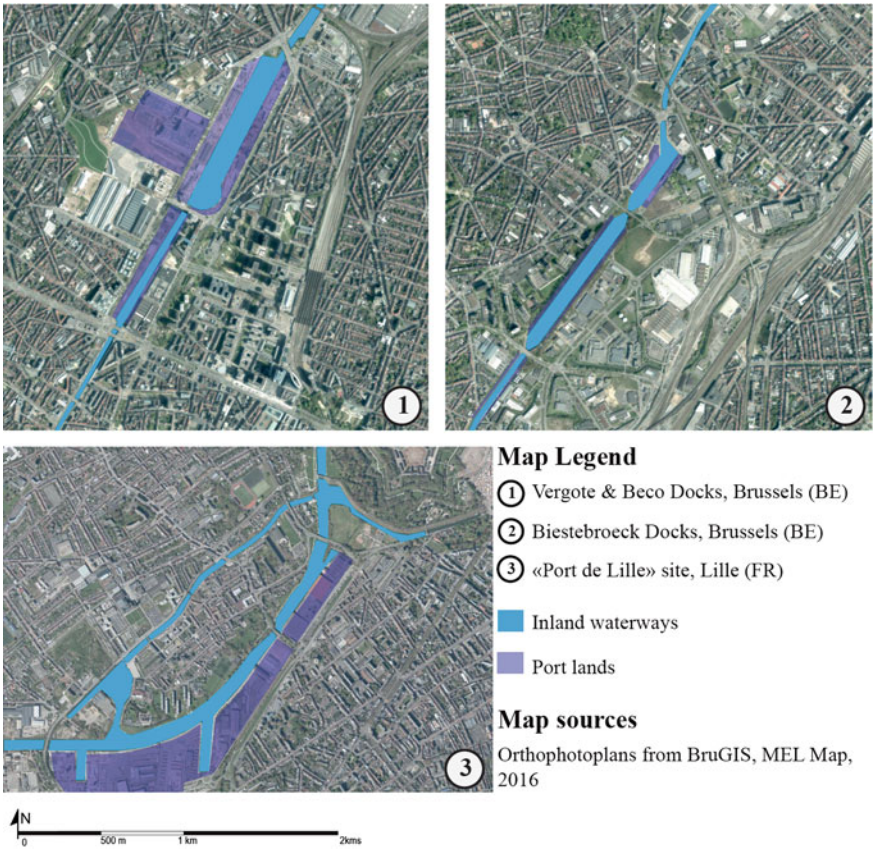

Fig. 2 Orthophotos of Vergote, Beco, and Biestebroeck Docks in Brussels, and "Port de Lille" site in Lille

of the waterway, or the presence of vegetation. However, these nuances do not influence the representations of these spaces expressed by stakeholders and users. These representations are further developed below.

In addition to their useful functions, which are linked to good transportation activities, do the singular spatial qualities of these port areas play another role in the city? Are they helping to create specific uses that are developed from their singularities?

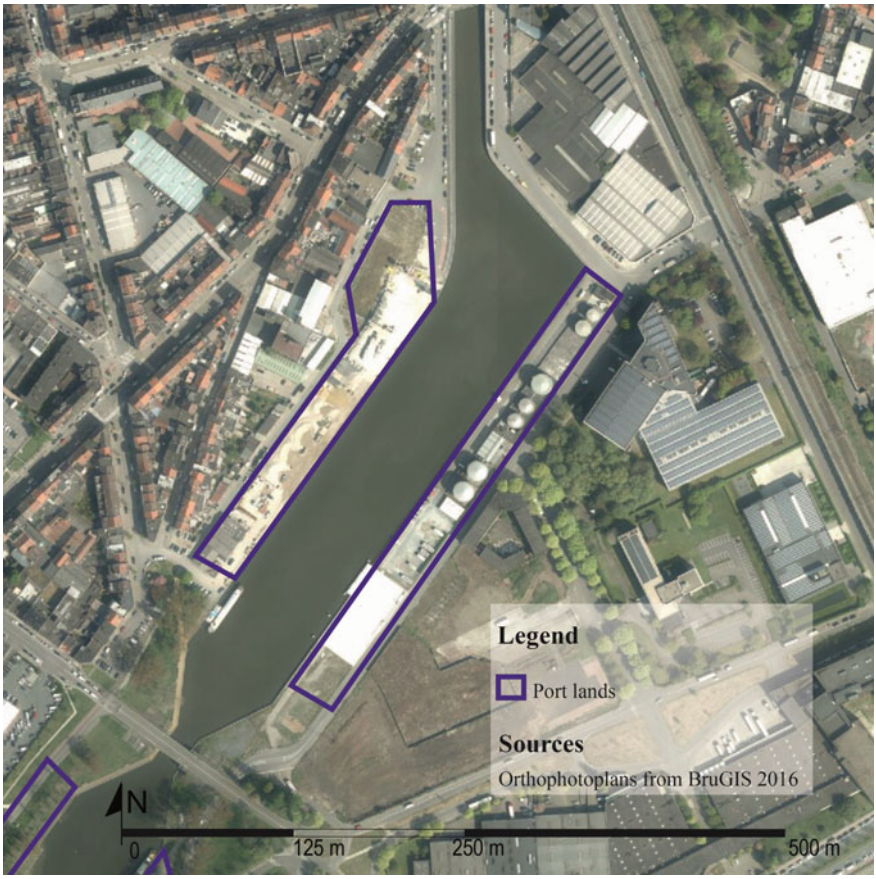

Fig. 3 Orthophotos of Biestebroeck Docks in Brussels

3 Spatial Representations of Port-City Interfaces: Tension or Control Areas?

3.1 Tension Areas: Using the Notion of "Wasteland" to Reconsider Port Areas

The first part of the analysis considers port-city interfaces as "built territories." It highlights the highly "geopolitical" dimension (Subra 2007), or at least the balance of power that arises during their conception phase, especially through the project process.

In many cases of *waterfronts*, the urban project accelerates the disconnection between the city and the port. These disconnections are embodied by the reproduction of functional cuts of the industrial era. The creation of a "city" system encircles, and eventually excludes, freezes, or relocates the remaining port activity areas. It is very

difficult to lead interdisciplinary approaches between urban and port spheres because of institutional, cultural, and economic factors. At an institutional level, the project processes struggle with an isolation that is linked to the port-city governance structure for the decisional systems. The barriers that tend to separate the city from the port culturally relate to the complexity of building a process able to unite diversified cultures of projects. The multiplication of projects generates a property pressure on the port wastelands as well as on the port areas that are still active. Another angle of analysis, focusing on territory representations, therefore appears to be necessary to help clarify the sources of tension that sometimes bring cities and ports into opposition.

> The project is an intention and not only an action […] Since space is a social construct, mental space and material space are intertwined. The action on space is also motivated by the symbolic values attributed to space and the stakes linked to space are also stakes of representations (Rosemberg-Lasorne 1997, p. 2).

In addition, the first step is to understand the sense of the representations that go along with that action. Spatial representations provide the "prism" through which actors or public opinion perceive the construction issues; thanks to them, these stakeholders understand the reality of space, the challenges that it endures, and that threaten its future (Subra 2007). Particularly in the case of coveted spaces, such as port-city interfaces, the study of spatial representations enables a better understanding of the basis of the spatial challenges and social tensions by analyzing the strategies of individual and social stakeholders (Bailly 1995, p. 378).

Table 1 List of semi-directed interviews to study the representations of people in charge of port-city interface construction

Urban stakeholders	Brussels	Lille
Municipality employee (urban development)	2	2
Regional/Intercommunal employee (urban development)	3	3
Urban planning offices	3	1
Local development center	1	
Militant association for water management	1	

Port stakeholders or associated	Brussels	Lille
Port employee (strategic department)	3	2
Port Board member (or representative)	1	1
Administration, institute, association for the promotion of waterway transport	3	1
National or regional administration in charge of freight transport	1	1
Researcher in logistics	1	

Box 1: Build Territories: Methodologies used to Study the Representations of People in Charge of the Port-City Interface Construction

We studied representations that are spread through the interview method.

> When we study a social representation with the interview method, the analysis of the content of the interviews can help us to analyze the content of the social representation (Negura 2006, p. 5).

We led 30 semi-directed interviews with Lille and Brussels stakeholders who are involved in the management and construction of the port-city interfaces (Table 1). These interfaces can be linked to the urban sphere (local coordinators and creators working for municipalities, town planning agencies, design offices…) or to the port and industrial sphere (within the ports or their communities, from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, river stakeholders, etc.). The purpose was to understand the representations from the port stakeholders about urban projects and, conversely, to understand the representations from urban stakeholders about port projects. For the development of the same space, how are the strategies and projects of the port stakeholders perceived by the urban stakeholders? And vice versa, how are the strategies and projects of the urban stakeholders perceived by port stakeholders? If these representations are both competing for the same space or are incompatible, they could, in fact, be the origin of preliminary obstacles to a peaceful cooperation. I use thematic analysis—explained by Negura (2006)—as a method of content analysis. The purpose is to find the semantic units that constitute the discursive universe of the utterance. In this case, this means reproducing a reformulation of the utterance content in a condensed and formal form. First, I outline the speech segments linked with the representations under study, i.e., the stakes and strategies of port and urban stakeholders and the factors that could block the development of these strategies. Second, these speech segments were put into thematic categories.

3.1.1 Replica of Compartmentalized Management in the Speech of the "Institutional" Stakeholders

The analysis of the representations shows that the fragmentation of the territory and the compartmentalized management between urban areas and port-industrial areas tend to be repeated in the speeches and representations of the stakeholders that organize these territories today. The definition of stakes and strategies for urban stakeholders can be obstacles to development for port stakeholders, and vice versa.

In this way, when we categorize the different records thematically, it appears that numerous representations of the urban stakeholders relate to the potential expansion of *the urban centrality by the mutation of industrial sites.*

> "The municipality clearly sees the development of a relatively dense and mixed area, even if the company is still there, but no longer with extremely heavy or dangerous activities;"
>
> "This site should become the center because we are no longer really on the outskirts. But everyone needs to find their place."

These urban stakeholders' representations are reflected in the expression of strategies on *opening, continuity with the city and nature in town.*

> "We defend the idea of a watershed. We must come back to hydrographic logic, the bearer of landscape issues. We must reconnect with water, even poetically, regain awareness of the shape of the city;"
>
> "the city wants to offer its banks to the promenade, which remains inaccessible."

For the urban stakeholders, the representation of the factors blocking the development of these strategies hinges on obstacles linked with *spatial isolation, action modes isolation, and difficulties in cooperating with the "extra-urban" port stakeholders.* In addition, the word "wasteland" is sometimes used by planners to designate the underused—but still active—port areas in a context of competition to develop these lands to give them urban functions.

> "There is a way of working that remains very compartmentalized";
>
> "They consider that they are not in town. Port stakeholders are not used to constraints and land optimization. They are used to spreading out over a field."

Reciprocally, the representations of the port stakeholders regarding the urban sphere can be perceived as a defensive attitude in the face of covetous designs on the urban redevelopment of port areas. These representations were mainly expressed by the *social acceptance of the port function*, *the will to give urban functions to the port areas and the loss of industrial and port properties becoming mixed areas.*

> "The planning of economic port and industrial activities encounters reluctance on the part of elected officials and residents. Elected officials defend economic activities such as the tertiary sector and the creative industry, fashionable, trendy";
>
> "We must constantly go against the enemy to make it clear that a port receives all types of products and products that are not necessarily polluting";
>
> "The market conditions in this type of problem are decisive. In a logic of property development, the housing function is today profitable. The logic of diversity initially envisaged is abandoned (continuance of logistic activities and pedestrian continuity) in favor of this property development logic."

Based on a desire for reconversion, these representations are considered as obstacles to the implementation of their strategies, focusing mainly on the development of the freight transport function. *The optimization of the port plots and the massification of flows through multimodal uses and the multi-site management of a platform network are seen as critical issues.*

> "We need to be able to reconcile urban planning concerns, but also to be able to fulfil our primary mission of carrying out transport, protecting storage, maintenance operations, etc.";
>
> "our goal is to densify our spaces alongside the waterway and to find solutions to treat more tons per linear meter."

3.1.2 Competitive Strategies Stemming from a Division Between Residential and Productive Economies

Following this analysis, we suppose that the port and urban strategies on the future of the port-city interfaces can be understood as the spatial expression of a division between the residential and productive economies.

These areas—located between the port and the city—are the focus of bigger scale debates, such as the economic decisions regarding reindustrialization, the pursuit of the expansion of the service sector, and the rise of residential economy in European cities.

Indeed, one of the objectives pursued by the urban project is the revalorization of the territory. It is based on various communication tools that represent the space in the project. It involves a staging of urban values (centrality, mobility, and accessibility), lifestyle, and the aesthetic and landscape quality of public spaces and buildings. These elements, which are identified as new values, participate in the redefinition of the identity of the developed space (Bailleul 2008). These new values support presence and consumption as new factors of territorial economic development. As emphasized by Davezies (2008), "the productive economy, in which the logic of firms is to establish themselves in order to produce, weighs little locally compared to the residential economy, based on consumption, and on firms which establish themselves to sell."

This competition for land, with the backdrop of debates regarding the productive and residential economies, is reinforced by ground rent, which favors residential, commercial, and administrative uses. The difference in ground rent between urban (residential, commercial, tourist, administrative, etc.) and port-industrial functions, and the temptation to create added-value on this differential, can speed up the conversion of port territories to other functions (Mazy 2017, p. 6).

In Brussels, the situation has recently been nuanced with the creation of the "Canal Team" and the urban integration of productive activities, stimulated by the team of the Brussels Master Architect, through the promotion of the "productive city" and the organization of architectural competitions around subjects such as the redevelopment of a concrete plant or a company specializing in waste sorting (Mazy and Debrie 2018).

3.2 Regulation Areas: Between Desire and Feelings of Nature

Another part of the analysis focuses on the lived dimension of these port-city interfaces. Several questions remain. Are the tensions generated by the design phase found in the material dimension of the territory? How are these areas built as such, and seen by the people that live in them? Are these tensions to be found in the spatial practices? On the contrary, could these port-city interfaces paradoxically play a part

in city regulations? Could they even function as an anti-gentrification strategy in a context of strong competition regarding the use of the ground (Rupprecht and Byrne 2018)?

Box 2: Lived Territories: Methodology for the Study of the Representations of Port-City Interface Users

To reveal the tendencies regarding the uses and representations related to the perception of space, the exploration support that was used was based on interview surveys.

> These surveys – which aim to understand a practical system (i.e. the practices and their links: ideologies, symbols,… – need modal and referential speeches (a speech that describes the way things are) obtained from interviews on the stakeholders' conceptions and description of the practices. (Blanchet and Gotman 2007, p. 30).

On site, 30 people (ten per site) "practicing these areas" between port and city were interviewed in a mid-season period, at different times of the day. The interviews were semi-directive, starting with easy and descriptive questions about their practices, questions regarding their knowledge of the on-site activities, and ending with questions to help determine their perceptions and opinions of the area and more particularly of the presence of port activities. The respondents were mainly 18–29 years old, and included workers, students, and employees that were representative of the neighborhood population.

As with the analysis of the "institutional" stakeholders' interviews, we used thematic analysis as a method of content analysis. First, we isolated fragments of the interview according to their theme: representations of the territory, uses, knowledge, and representations of the port activities. These parts were then grouped into thematic categories. For instance, regarding the spatial representations, four general themes stood out: quiet spaces, nature in town, areas with an interesting industrial style, and dirty areas. Some of the themes were then divided according to their negative or positive connotation. Finally, we created a form for each topic, recording the generally identified themes and the speech fragments related to them. The purpose was not to conduct a representative and quantitative analysis, but mainly to highlight the diversity of the main tendencies regarding the uses and representations of the people who live on these territories.

3.2.1 Many Differences Among Users' Representations of the Port-City Interface

The idea mainly associated with these port-city interfaces (Figs. 4, 5 and 6) is "quiet areas, giving a feeling of nature." According to the interviews, these areas primarily offer three spatial qualities (mentioned in 16 of 30 interviews):

- the possibility of withdrawing and finding solitude:

  "a quiet and peaceful place;" "You don't get bothered" and "You don't bother anyone";

  "A place where we can relax instead of being in the city center with people around talking a lot";

Fig. 4 People relaxing in front of Vergote Docks in Brussels, near sand deposits © K. Mazy

"I come here to gather my thoughts";

"It's nice to stay here when I want to be alone."

- the attraction of a "breathing" place that opens the senses, for example, when at sea:

"my motivation to come here is the water, the wind and the freshness";

"water clears your mind, as does the sea";

"There, you see water, boats and fish";

"When I see the barges, I start dreaming I am aboard and that I'm on my way to some other country";

"We come to stare at the scenery, the birds and the bikes that pass by";

"It makes me think of the sea, I feel the breeze."

- the representation of "nature" in town

"I like it. There is nature, there's everything. We meet each other. We have a little fun";

"I like to come here because it's natural, there are still animals. When we get closer to the center, there's nothing. There are herons and hedgehogs at night."

These feelings of retreat and the opening of senses, and a feeling of nature appear even more strongly since they are related to very dense environments that are isolated by transportation infrastructures, as discussed earlier. Accordingly, these areas can

Fig. 5 A fisherman, alongside Biestebroeck Docks, opposite a warehouse of construction materials © K. Mazy

Fig. 6 Panoramic view of the "Port de Lille" site © K. Mazy

play a regulatory role close to dense urban zones and act as a valve. These valves then function like a decompression chamber, a way of unwinding that allows people to channel what is not satisfied by everyday life (Lageiste 2008).

In contrast to this idea of positive tranquility, the second descriptive words that stand out are "a dirty place" (mentioned in 5 of 30 interviews):

"It is quite dirty;" "it is gross;" "It looks like a dump";

"The trucks bring a lot of dust";

"It is dirty and chaotic";

"It's annoying when we hear the horns of the boats and cars close by";

"the smells and all that comes with them: pollution, boats, transport; people dump their trash."

Regarding the uses, the theme that stood out for the most part was "peaceful moments," mostly linked with sport and leisure activities (mentioned in 13 of 30 interviews):

"We come here to fish and walk the dogs";

"I play football here. Sometimes, I work out or I run in the morning";

"We come to see the barges, for the activities, to ride our bikes or to see the boats. Sometimes, we climb on the sand dunes."

Another recurrent theme among uses that is linked to "peaceful moments" is "moments of retreat, contemplation, or even meditation" (mentioned in 5 of 30 interviews):

"I think, it gives me time to think";

"I come here to think, to empty my mind or to remember my childhood";

"I come here to relax. I watch the landscape. I grew up here, it brings back memories";

"I come here alone to think";

"I come almost every day to see the animals. I smoke and I watch the view."

Finally, to heighten the given representations, a final question appealed to the interviewee's imagination: *If you could reinvent this place, what would you do with it?* A significant number of responses were in favor of preserving the existing situation for the peace it offers, but also because the space, as appropriate as it is, has become their space (mentioned in 10 of 30 interviews):

"For the moment, I would leave it like this";

"We would leave it this way. We are used to seeing it like this and it's good, this is our place";

"I want to keep it like this. These buildings have always been here, and they are an integral part of the décor."

Between keeping the situation as it is and the wish for drastic change, some of the interviewees commented on potential improvements in the urban integration of the port (mentioned in 5 of 30 interviews):

"We could give it a new lease of life; it is not really nice to look at";

"The city has grown, but does the port have to disappear? We should perhaps work on its integration. Green areas are missing. We could try to combine port activities with the city by camouflaging them, for instance."

Finally, a considerable number of responses were in favor of drastic change of the port sites, with the ports being either relocated or replaced by a park (mentioned in 6 of 30 interviews):

> "The industrial activities on this riverbank could move to the other bank and a big park with playgrounds and activities can be built here. However, some neighbors do not agree as they think a park would attract thugs and smokers";
>
> "I don't know if it's possible to relocate these businesses. If it is possible, this would allow us to build a garden";
>
> "Let's demolish everything and make it a field. There is no need for a survey, since everyone thinks it's ugly."

According to some responses, a new urban project should replace the present site (mentioned in 4 interviews of 30):

> "Monuments, or something like that. I went to Paris and there I saw monuments on the riverbanks. Here, there is nothing";
>
> "It would be good to do something because there is nothing, it's empty. Social housing or new companies would be good here."

3.2.2 Should We Strengthen the Role of the Port-City Interfaces as Valves in a Dense Urban Environment?

There are three considerations that emerge from this analysis.

First, the representations of these sites, their uses, and their future are extremely diverse. They can be both very positive—quiet areas, breathing space, peaceful moments—and negative—dirty place—and are sometimes marked by a desire for drastic change. This shows that people can assess a landscape in many ways.

> A landscape is not only the portrait of a site or an act of nature, it is also made of conventions that are commonly shared by a society at a certain time (Paulhan, quoted by Paquot 2016, p. 60).

From this point of view, the diversity of representations of port-city interfaces echoes the variety of perceptions of urban wastelands, "*sometimes negatively valued or considered as abandoned spaces and sometimes positively valued and considered as natural spaces useful for multiple activities*" (Brun et al. 2018, p. 9).

Then comes the desire for "controlled" nature through the creation of parks, for example, to transform dirty, gray, polluted places. City-dwellers demand "clean" nature that is "under control" (Robert and Yengué 2018).

Finally, even though these post-industrial landscapes bear strong traces of human activity, the users' dominant representations paradoxically share some features of the "feelings of nature," as described by Paquot (2016). Throughout history, "natural" landscapes have always been associated with certain representations that can arouse the feeling of retreat, activating the imagination and stimulating the senses.

Since the Renaissance, natural landscapes have been experienced or thought of as privileged places for retreat, refuge, and introversion.

> "Natural" landscapes become the shelters of "spiritual" landscapes. They are more about personal journeys than panoramic views, an echo to the Socratic method of getting to know yourself (Paquot 2016, p. 49).

Yet the "empty" spaces of port-city interfaces are far from the common image of a nature show but are nevertheless mainly represented by their users as places of retreat where solitude can be found.

In the early twentieth century, often linked with the need for retreat and silence, places likely to stimulate the imagination were promoted by citizens who demanded "decent conditions for reverie and a retreat beneficial for introspection, for a feeling of well-being, in addition to silence" (Paquot 2016, p. 63). Moreover, "experience of the natural environment does not require grand and remote places, nor even a prolonged stay in a natural setting" (Kaplan et al. 1998). Despite their creation during the industrial period, and marked by an appeal to science and technology to the detriment of living, these empty spaces were still located at the interface of the city, with the port acting as a place of contemplation and meditation, far from the urban tumult.

Since the eighteenth century, the feeling of nature has been expressed as an emotion stimulated by the perceptions of our five senses (the smells, the salty taste of the sea air, the sun, the wind, dryness or moisture on the skin, etc.) (Paquot 2016, p. 54). The proximity of the water attracts residents to these places at the edge of the canal—called "breathing places"—that can activate the senses. Like a maritime area, the wind, breeze, and freshness which rush into this urban space, the canal, have an impact on the skin. The lapping of the water lulls our ears, while the wind blows a variety of odors from the waves to our nostrils. These pleasures for all the senses awaken an affective dimension in the relationship between human beings and things. The strong desire of a large proportion of users to preserve the situation shows a significant attachment to these hybrid landscapes.

4 Conclusion

The port-city relationship is characterized by a progressive disconnection. On the one hand, the fluvial ports have progressively detached themselves from the cities to be closer to efficient infrastructures (fluvial, rail, and, more recently, motorway networks) and land development opportunities. On the other hand, cities have repeatedly coveted port lands as areas to be reconverted to preserve and develop activities with higher added value. The port-city disconnection has led to the formation of wastelands. However, this stage is sometimes obliterated by speculative or anticipatory reconversion processes during this period of obsolescence.

Since the 1980s, cities with an inland port have accelerated the reconversion sequences of port spaces next to city centers for two main reasons. The first reason is based on a political will to bring back city dwellers to the city, in a context of territorial competition and internationalization strategies. Water is widely used as a natural and pleasant backdrop for contemporary recreation. The second reason is the spread of waterfront reconversion models developed in seaport cities from the 1950s. However, the geographic contexts of sea and inland ports differ. The narrow waterway does not allow the port to emerge over the water, while seaports

are possible on the sea or coastal fringes (bluefield). In addition, port-city interfaces are integrated into tight urban networks, surrounded by transportation infrastructures. This configuration creates growing competition between urban and port uses for the development of these wastelands or underused spaces.

How are these places represented by their creators/stakeholders and users? The present analysis shows that the perspective of this port-city issue strongly depends on point of view, particularly those of creators and users. Some build them, others live in them. The main divergence concerns the role of conflict in the production of the territory. From the point of view of the conception of the port-city interface, the approach to these areas can be qualified as "geopolitical" where their contours move according to conflicts and consensus and mobilize many different groups of stakeholders.

The users' point of view of these interfaces located between cities and ports is somehow different from the contentious environment of the creation and decision spheres that relate to these spaces. On the one hand, some citizens beg for more "controlled" nature to transform an area that is seen as dirty, gray, or polluted. On the other hand, the representation of a peaceful, breathing space, capable of activating the senses, combined with moments of relaxation or retreat, dominates the comments of their users. This representation takes on more meaning in dense physical environments surrounded by transport infrastructure. The desire for temporary distance could be due to the need to unwind, to release daily stress. From this point of view, these spaces have the same relation to cities that attics have to house, i.e., "*places where we can idle far from the tumult, dream and put the world to rights*" (Bachelard, quoted by Dorso 2012, p. 51). By allowing these precious getaways, as mentioned by F. Dorso, these port-city interfaces offer a place for mechanisms of control of social life. In addition, despite not being considered as natural landscapes, the representations described here, however, share certain traits with feelings of nature, such as a sense of retreat, to dream and activate the senses. At a time when waterway spaces are considered as *cultural infrastructures* (Farinella 2005) or *blue urban ecosystem services* (Haase 2015), it seems important to integrate their quality of emptiness, in very tight urban network, creating a quiet environment for retreat and solitude, activating the imagination and stimulating the senses. Future investigations by planners could, therefore, focus on exploiting the role of these interstitial breathing spaces within urbanized spaces in dense urban environments as a secondary function for ports.

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