

## **Border-related and urban processes in the port of Strasbourg. A geohistorical analysis of the role of the river in linking the city and the port.**

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## **Border-related and urban processes in the port of Strasbourg. A geohistorical analysis of the role of the river in linking the city and the port.**

### **Introduction. The economic and political links between a city and a port: some interpretative directions**

The geohistorical approach amounts to analyzing the interplay between the timescales and spatial scales which are responsible for the composition of areas in the long term (Grataloup, 1996). When applied to the relationship between a city and its port, it is based on an identification of the different phases of the relationship between the city and port which reflect an economic process that is embedded in a given geographical context. In the case of Strasbourg this context involves a city and port that are located on a border. This double approach can therefore be seen as combining the spatial and temporal approaches, i.e. the approach which describes the general change in port and urban spaces (the relationship between the city and the port) and the approach which describes the changes that are specific to a border area (the geopolitical aspects of an urban location). The geographical dynamic of Strasbourg is thus the outcome of the combination of these two dimensions. The geohistory of this combination stretches from the first port facilities to ongoing discussions in connection with planning goals for the Strasbourg-Kehl crossborder metropolis. It allows us to examine three phases of the relationship between the urban area and the port which is fuelled by the tension between severance and connection that is characteristic of a port city but also influenced by the effect of the border. This change can be analyzed using the model proposed by Peter Hall (2005 & 2010) based on the triptych of connection/disconnection and reconnection.

### **The three phases of the relationship between the city and the port amplified by the influence of the border**

The first phase, that of connection, illustrates what we can refer to as canal-based urban planning. In the first half of the 19th century, towpaths were built along the quays and the bridges were rebuilt to facilitate boat traffic. The *Canal des Faux Remparts*, which was obsolete from the military standpoint and which provided access to the city from the canals that connected the Rhône to the Rhine and the Marne to the Rhine, was widened and deepened. It was therefore not by chance that Strasbourg's second railway station, after Koenigshoffen station, was built nearby in 1855 on the site currently occupied by the city market. The first half of the 19th century saw a large number of urban development programmes (theatre, cereal market, station...) positioned around the Grande Ile and its newly improved quays. Although this phase did not produce a genuine urban port, it nevertheless illustrates very well the historical link between urban planning and river transport which can be observed in the majority of European inland cities. In the case of Strasbourg, the strategic restrictions associated with the military command of a fortress and the hydrological transformations of the Rhine, which were indirectly linked to an affirmation of its border function, prevented the displacement of the port to restrict it to the area inside the city walls.

The second phase, that of disconnection, was marked by a separation between the port and urban functions that occurred as a result of the movement of port infrastructure on the Rhine. In the case of Strasbourg, it coincided with the city's integration within the German Empire, when the imperatives of defence became weaker and new business opportunities were opened up. This function of a supra-regional commercial hub gained even more importance when Alsace was returned to France in 1918, as the port became the spearhead for France's

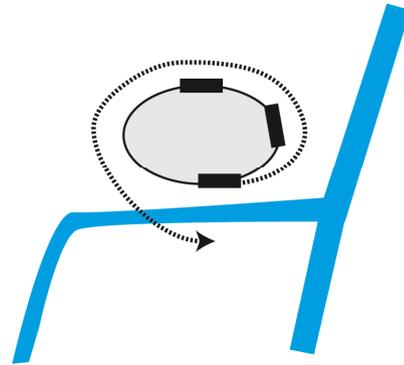
presence on the Rhine and acted as a strategic interface between the occupied Rhineland and eastern France's huge industrial and agricultural hinterland. The city's morphology is still strongly marked by this dissociation

The three phases of the relationship between the city and the port

**The 19th century  
and canal-based urban planning**

**The urban port CONNEXION**

- urban planning in "Grande Île"
- upgrading of quays
- city enclosed by canals



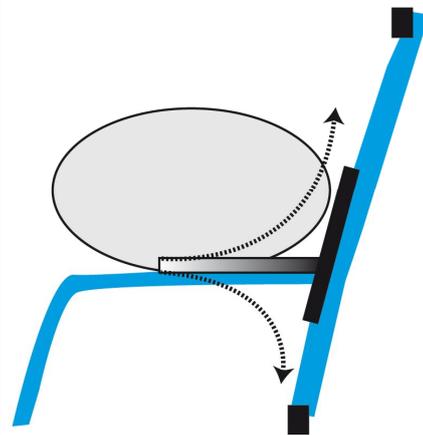
**The 20th century  
and development of the port**

**the dominance of zoning**

**DECONNECTION**

*The port: an extraterritorial area*

- disassociation between the west and the east
- port structured in a north-south direction along the Rhine
- the port extends outside the city (Lauterbourg)
- conquest of the Rhine waterfront

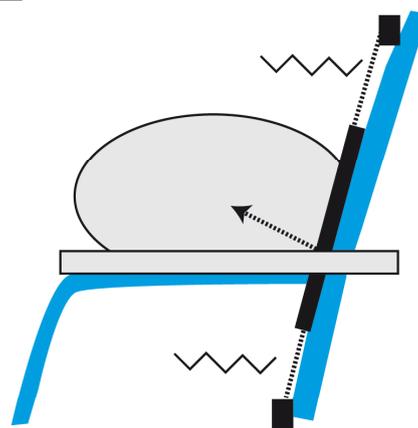


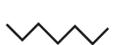
**RECONNECTION**

*The port in its surrounding areas*

- the Strasbourg / Kehl urban development axis
- port intermodality and urban distribution (N-S)
- negotiation between city and port regarding interfaces
- using the canals to reconnect different parts of the city

(c) Beyer & Debrie, 2011.



 River and canals	 Port space	 Dynamic of port activities
 Urban space	 Port wasteland	 Protected natural zones

between the west (urban functions) and the east (industrial and port functions) This phase involves a general urban disassociation of functions that leads to increasingly marked zoning of space that is further accentuated by the protection of publicly-owned port areas. The disassociation between port functions and urban functions amount to a separation, and for many urban actors the port remained an extraterritorial area and was therefore not considered during the urban planning process. The Franco-German border became more firmly established during the 1930s and once again became a very strong barrier after 1945, which reinforced this severance. The border put the port in a doubly peripheral position, on the outskirts of the conurbation and backing onto the Rhine on the edge of the national territory. The industrial, military and customs installations constituted a powerful buffer zone which amounted to a second border. The port, more than the Rhine, represented the ultimate boundary of the conurbation and was completely excluded from the urban planning process.

The third phase, that of reconnection, still lies in the future. It is only very recently that the beginnings of new relationships seem to be appearing in the framework of sustainable urban planning. These exist in the framework of formalized partnerships (development contracts) and open partnerships (port workshops).) This third phase also involves a change in the impact of the border from that of severance to that of connection in which the pursuit of integration is amplified by the European context of open borders. The project to create a transborder conurbation places the port space in a central position in the urbanization project within the “Strasbourg-Kehl ecocity, the two river bank metropolis”. New possibilities for making use of the port heritage (the Starlette and Citadelle programmes) involve adopting a property development strategy within the port, under the influence of the general increase in urban land pressure. This strategy is accompanied by a transfer of port activities to outside the city and negotiations aimed at consolidating the existing activities in the central zone. With regard to urban actors, recognition in the Strasbourg Regional Masterplan (Schéma de Cohérence Territoriale de la Région de Strasbourg - SCOTERS) of the importance of the port and its role with regard to achieving sustainable mobility also marks the development of a new approach. For the time being, this is restricted to a few general goals that are not explained in detail (promotion of combined transport within the port of Strasbourg, promotion of road and rail transport, strengthening of the North-South interport link) but which are still at the discussion or study stage. In Strasbourg, as elsewhere, negotiations with regard to the relationship between the city and the port involve new trade-offs between urban functions and logistical / industrial functions.

### **Conclusion: the city in the port and the port in the city, the two sides of reconnection.**

Our geohistorical account illustrates the phases in the relationship between the city and the port which involve evolving trade-offs between the different functions which shape urban space. While the phase of disconnection between productive and residential functions is a general feature of the urban phase, perhaps the current dialogues between the city and the port foreshadow a new phase, in which the goal of sustainability makes it necessary to reconsider interfaces. This reconnection has two very different aspects. The first is present in the majority of port cities and consists of redeveloping derelict port land for service sector use. What is new here is the position of the port authorities which are acting as property developers with regard to this longstanding process of redeveloping derelict land near the urban centre. In Strasbourg, this process takes on a novel form as a result of the decision to engage in transborder development, and therefore redevelop a line running east-west which

passes through port spaces. The border in this case becomes an urban project. The second aspect of reconnection which lies more in the future, involves new ways of thinking about the sustainable city which in the area of transport requires a complete overhaul of urban freight distribution practices. The port could then become an important driver of sustainability by taking on a logistical function for the city and contributing to a reduction in urban congestion and pollution. In Strasbourg, the goals that have been identified in current planning documents and studies aim to bring this about. The city in the port (redeveloping derelict port land for the service sector) and the port in the city (urban freight transport) are two aspects which the urban and port actors are currently exploring and which could bring about a new phase in the relationship between the city and the port.

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