

Book Review - Cities on the shore: the urban littoral frontier

Nick Williams*

Attracting new flows of capital and people as a catalyst for economic and social renewal is becoming the focus of attention for many large cities around the world. As they strive to out-compete each other their burgeoning size is causing many to turn to the commissioning of mega-projects to achieve their status and goals. With this new focus, mega-projects are unfolding into greater and more ambitious waterfront projects and reclamations from once uninhabitable real estate - the water. The reclamation of land from rivers, estuaries, wetlands, and the sea has been occurring since the earliest of times, vastly predating the ostentatious islands of Dubai or the land-deprived Hong Kongs of the world.

Cities on the Shore is a result of research undertaken in many different parts of the world over a period of more than 30 years and is written in the belief that the reclamation of land for urban development is much more common than is generally realised. The author's theory is that far from being a phenomenon that occurs only in special circumstances, reclamation of land for urban development is a normal process of city expansion.

Hudson has studied land reclamation since 1959 when as a final year undergraduate at the University of Liverpool he made a study of Teesside, the industrial development and reclamation of the Tees estuary. Over the years, while working in Britain, West Africa, Hong Kong, the West Indies and Australia he maintained his interest in land reclamation and urban development. Having written and published papers in various journals his aim was to produce a book to attempt to treat the topic from a global perspective as a normal process of urban development. His starting point is that reclamation researchers focused too much on the special circumstances of a particular location, especially in places where development pressures are great and there are severe topographical restraints.

The book itself opens with an engaging introduction which zeros in on the examples of less obvious, but certainly not insignificant, waterfront reclamations in Auckland and Wellington, and then Sydney. These examples are sure to offer an interesting segue for New Zealand readers, and bring both some familiarity and relativity to the topic. Introductions aside, the book is much more global and the author's deep understanding of the topic is expressed through various case studies. Among the places most frequently used are Hong Kong, San Francisco Bay and Teesside.

The author strives to comprehensively cover the subject from the earliest years, pre industrial right up until the mid 1990's, showing that the planning issues and tradeoffs of yesteryear and the innovative solutions designed to enhance and mitigate our impacts on the surrounding environments are reflected in the similar tradeoffs and predicaments faced by planners of today. Albeit slightly less evolved, the economic, logistic, political, and social issues are all played out in very similar fashion. For the avid theorist on this topic this book is a must read, and given that the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement 2010 has particularly strong policies on coastal reclamation, it is perhaps timely to revisit this classic.

What may seem at first to be a limitation, the emphasis on only case studies with which he is most personally familiar may be a blessing in disguise, as too many more may well have detracted from the ability of the author to set the scene and frame his story as effectively. For this reason I cannot fault his approach.

The book lacks in contemporary theory on 'green', low impact and transit-orientated design for waterfront development. However, this literature and research is relatively recent and with respect to the time period from which the book is set, it does not detract from its cause.

The author covers much, but does so in a chronological manner which helps the reader to understand why a particular situation has been played out, what may have influenced it and how we as a society may have learned in the process. The structure enables the reader to track the trials and tribulations of urban littoral reclamation from water side camp, through industrial growth, health concerns, market speculation/development pressure, to logistical dilemmas/engineering feats, and environmental opposition leading to greater public awareness and input in decision-making. The make-up of this book is such that it entices the reader to follow on, and learn while it references back and forth through the various case-studies as they relate to the narrative.

Cities on the shore is informative as much as it is accessible. Whether or not the reader is an expert on the topic, it is sure to be an enjoyable read. The book offers a valuable insight and overview on the history of land reclamation up until the mid to late 1990's. It should be an essential read for those who are interested in this global phenomenon in an age where real estate pressures, city expansion and littoral zone protection is an ever-increasing domain of importance for planners of today.

Hudson, B. J. (1996). *Cities on the shore: the urban littoral frontier*. New York: Pinter.
180 pages

*Nick Williams is a Lincoln University student who completed his BEMP in 2010 and is returning in 2012 for postgraduate studies.