The process of modernization, especially during the twentieth century, has brought about dramatic changes in most cities situated on a body of water. The search for efficiency and functionality has profoundly affected coastal and urban landscapes: gigantism in the port industry has contributed to the degradation of environmental resources and habitats, and modernization processes have marginalized local cultures and historical, community-based values, thus causing original features and local specificity to disappear from most of our historical waterfronts.

During the last few decades, the restructuring of port and industrial activities, the greater importance of leisure and tourism, and increasing concern for environmental matters have led to the "rediscovery of water" and to the design and implementation of new urban policies aimed at redeveloping urban waterfronts.

Against this background, Venice and Tokyo represent paradigmatic cases of the many challenges which confront urban governance in cities on water. In fact, the urban history of these cities is intimately linked to their relationship with water, which has changed over the centuries, creating articulated and complex structures that have characterized their physical aspect, and even the image of the two cities offered to the rest of the world.

From this perspective, this volume highlights the most important socio-economic, historical, identitarian, environmental, and cultural dimensions of the process of the "rediscovery of water" in Venice and Tokyo, as well as offering a re-evaluation of their heritage and identity as cities of water. It pays particular attention to the various implications of living in such a fragile and liminal space between land and water, where natural risks and social and economic vulnerability are particularly high.

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