The United States contribution to the PORTUS 38 Preservation and Port Heritage collection presents three port city case studies. Each are river ports located along the Atlantic Coast: the three towns that comprise the Thames River Estuary region in the Northeastern state of Connecticut; the mid-Atlantic city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania located along the Delaware River; and, the southern city of Savannah, Georgia on the Savannah River. Each have colonial origins dating back to the 18th- and early 19th-centuries, with cyclical historic periods of port success and decline. New London was an international whaling port, Savannah a world cotton exporter, and Philadelphia led a century of industrial strength from the 1860s through the end of World War II. Each city experienced post-war industrial crisis; whether the result of declining port activity, declining overall economic activity, or both. In this, of course, their historic profiles and patterns are similar, in general, to may port cities in the Western world.

The three port cities each has a patrimony of what Alan Plattus calls the “cognate urban districts of warehouses, markets, bars, brothels and housing which were fed by the ports and their traffic” [1]. These remnants are shells of past port clusters which, more often than not, have long since sought more space, better regional intermodal connectivity, and cheaper land in their metropolitan peripheries. In the early 1980s, if small waterfront urban commercial enclaves helped to launch urban core reinvestment, that was enough. Plattus describes this era of festival projects as “pleasure craft”, with programs oriented toward mall-like consumption, and removed from both their port pasts, and the broader social, economic, cultural, and material metropolitan presents. Discussions of urban “authenticity” is always tricky, but the three case studies explain how each port city is trying to engage in what Harris Steinberg refers to as “creative placemaking” with their port heritage to create a more vital, integrated, and meaningful urban waterfronts [2].

For Philadelphia, this means embracing the arts and their catalytic potential to reconfigure its piers and historic waterfront facilities. In Connecticut, heritage is celebrated in its museums at the Mystic Seaport, but also along Thames estuary, in Groton and New London, with a submarine maker and a pharmaceutical company that take advantage of port-era building size and building footprints. As Plattus points out, “it is clear that port and maritime heritage in this case, enters directly into the current life, and livelihood of these communities, and that visitors are not

merely, or mainly entertained by a retrospective experience" [3]. For each case, the projects and interventions are networked across bodies of river, and form heritage constellations that are revitalizing their respective waterfronts.

Savannah's relationship with its port heritage is perhaps more complex. The entire original gridded-layout of its downtown, designed by James Oglethorpe, is literally the base of its thriving tourist industry. As Patrick Haughey explains, for Savannah "heritage" is a construct that moves through the city's history with greater or lesser care in relationship to perceived economic opportunities. Haughey illustrates this with the example of a thriving hotel sector nestled in historic port warehouse buildings [4]. The case seems to suggest that while, like Groton and New London, the programs are economically-inspired, their service-sector orientation and facile nostalgia are perhaps simply the River Street festival model in older "clothes."

In all three cases, universities -design schools in particular- have played important roles in helping cities to reimagine and articulate creative placemaking initiatives. PennPraxis, Yale Urban Design Workshop, and the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) all focus on their respective waterfront circumstances as rich environments to explore through design, and then think them forward by conjugating port pasts with contemporary stakeholders to assemble collective future visions. These are not easy challenges. As the many case studies of these PORTUS volumes demonstrate, there are no easy formulas. But the U.S. three case studies suggest that imagination, civic vitality, design, and education are all very important ingredients for success. M.I.T. recently awarded its prestigious Norman B. Leventhal City Prize to the Malden Works for Waterfront Equity and Resilience for their work in Malden, Massachusetts in activating ex-industrial areas along the riverfront and increase access to the water and its heritage, and this too seems to indicate that the above-mentioned elements for successful creative placemaking are incorporated in other successful case studies as well [5].

While not included in these three Atlantic coast case studies, it is also worth mentioning that the recently-signed National Resources Management Act included the legal designation of the Maritime Washington National Heritage Area for the Pacific-coast state of Washington (where the port of Seattle is located). The

designated area includes 3,000 miles (4,848 km) of saltwater shoreline in the Puget Sound area of Western Washington, and it will focus primarily on protecting and promoting maritime heritage. While case study project scales of PORTUS 37 and 38 volumes range from neighborhoods and districts to the Connecticut estuary region, Washington's 3,000-mile shoreline designation moves to the geographic scale, with an exponential increase of challenges and opportunities for port and maritime heritage [6].

And finally, the more recent Delaware River Waterfront Corporation (DRWC) inclusion of the Graffiti Pier in Philadelphia -the city's most Instagrammed location- into its network of revitalized waterfront projects opens a new opportunity for the city to successfully "complicate the narrative" of simple pleasure craft, as Plattus calls for (see image). Graffiti, of course, is a public, popular art medium often neglected in official urban arts initiatives. Studio Zewde will curate the newly-acquired space as a living park that can strengthen shoreline resilience, while also respecting the accumulated graffiti storytelling on its concrete and bricks. Here creative placemaking and heritage may simply be to let the graffiti speak [7].

The three U.S. case studies help to illustrate the complexity of creative placemaking in footprints of their ports' past. It is curious, for example, that Savannah, Georgia, a city known as the U.S.'s first planned city, does not seems to have to fulfill the potential of port heritage and preservation in the successful ways highlighted in the Connecticut Thames Estuary region or in Philadelphia. Yet in terms of each city's contemporary port activity, Savannah far outpaces the other two cities, and is second only to Port of New York and New Jersey for highest container (TEU) throughput on the East Coast. PORTUS 37 and 38 help to highlight unique port heritage benchmarks and from there, begin to discern larger international patterns and trends from which we can learn a great deal.

Notes

[1] See Plattus, A. “Port as Public Space: the Thames River Heritage Park New London and Groton, Connecticut” in this volume.

[2] See Steinberg, H. “Preservation and placemaking along Philadelphia’s Delaware River Waterfront” in this volume.

[3] See Plattus, A. “Port as Public Space: the Thames River Heritage Park New London and Groton, Connecticut” in this volume.

[4] See Haughey, P.D. “The Historic Port of Savannah: A History from Slavery to Heritage Tourism” in this volume.

[5] Norman B. Leventhal City Prize. www.http://leventhalcityprize.mit.edu/

[6] Dunagan, C. “A new federal law recognizes Washington’s maritime heritage.” *Kitsap Sun.* March 13, 2019. https://pugetsoundblogs.com/waterways/2019/03/13/a-new-federal-law-recognizes-washingtons-maritime-heritage/

[7] Studio Zewde. Graffiti Pier. https://studio-zewde.com/graffiti-pier

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Head image: Image of the Graffiti Pier. (Source: Studio Zewde, https://studio-zewde.com/graffiti-pier)