

## [EAUH 2020: Socialist Port Cities and their Global Entanglements](#)

Announcement published by Brigitte LeNormand on Friday, November 1, 2019

Type:

Call for Papers

Date:

October 27, 2019

Location:

Belgium

Subject Fields:

Asian History / Studies, Eastern Europe History / Studies, Latin American and Caribbean History / Studies, Maritime History / Studies, Urban History / Studies

Call for Papers for panel on "Socialist Port Cities and their Global Entanglements" at the European Association for Urban History meeting (Antwerp, 2-5 September 2020)

**Session organizers:** Brigitte Le Normand, University of British Columbia, Canada; Sarah Lemmen, U. Complutense de Madrid, Spain

This session examines socialist port cities around the world as a specific urban form, and interrogates the role of ports in connecting socialist states to the world. It aims to encourage comparisons between different cases for the purpose of clarifying what was specific to socialist port cities; and to build a foundation and a research agenda for future research in this field.

### **Session content:**

Ports play a special role from an economic, social, and political role in modern societies, and this is particularly true in the case of socialist countries. In a political system that preferred closed borders, ports symbolized the "gates to the world"; in an economic system that was thoroughly planned, ports became the main contact point for global trade outside of a planned economy.

In many ways, socialist ports were places of exception: heightened contact with the rest of the world went hand in hand with heightened control; the relative permeability of ports as border regions allowed for intensified smuggling, black marketeering or defection. Because of their permeable nature, socialist ports - and their adjacent shipyards - were also potentially places of increased potential for political protest and dissent. At the same time, port cities could also be imbued with a strong symbolic function, particularly if they were also centers of industrial production. When socialist states adopted policies of openness to their competitors, ports could also become, and be seen, as engines of material and cultural progress.

An extensive literature interrogates the idea of the port city as a spatially, socially, and culturally distinctive urban form, playing a specific role within national and regional economies. This scholarship has analyzed how port activities have shaped cities, with a focus on infrastructure and industrial, commercial, and financial activities and networks. It has highlighted their role as contact

zones, vital to importing new ideas, goods, and practices, and in transforming their hinterlands. Scholars have sought to understand port cities as social spaces, examining particular social groups such as merchant elites, ship-builders, and sailors. They have examined how these groups produced distinctive cultures, such as the cosmopolitanism of merchant elites with transnational ties, as well as specific working class cultures. Generally, however, this literature has left aside socialist port cities. Do these claims about port cities apply to socialist ports? To what extent did state socialism result in different incarnations of port cities? In what ways did ports connect socialist states, and specific cities, globally? And what impacts did socialist port cities have on their hinterlands?

The [call for papers](#) for the EAUH2020 conference has been **extended to 27 October 2019**. (Actual closing: 28 October 00h01)

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