

Scheda sintetica descrittiva

Premio INU Letteratura Urbanistica 2015

articolo su rivista

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Titolo articolo "LIVERPOOL @ SHANGHAI. The waterfront as a brandscape in Liverpool Waters case study"

Rivista TRIA n. 11 (Territorio della Ricerca su Insediamenti e Ambiente), RIVISTA INTERNAZIONALE DI CULTURA URBANISTICA

Anno 2013 Vol. 6 n. 2 ISSN 1974-6849, e-ISSN 2281-4574 Page 157-170

Immagine copertina:



Abstract:

Since the 18th century, Liverpool was an important maritime city. In the 20th century, this economic model declined and the waterfront started shrinking, eroding the core centre of the city. Since then Liverpool administration started stimulating new investments: the symbolic marine background, a central place of the city of production, was turned into a benchmark of the city of consumption.

The waterscape was transformed into a brandscape: Liverpool created a twin-city relationship with Shanghai (China), trying to attract new investors to accelerate the regeneration. With the "One city, Nine towns" plan (2001), Shanghai created a branding strategy and an efficacious urban planning perspective all at one time, using well-known European styles to realize its expansion areas along the waterfront.

Working on this model, Liverpool Waters project proposes a Shanghai-alike waterfront skyline, with disproportionate towers, refusing the city waterscape heritage, listed as World Heritage Site by UNESCO. The main landmark of the area - a skyscraper called Shanghai Tower, is not an attempt to embody Shanghai cultures or its urban environment, but rather to line up to its lifestyle and social-economic conditions, to put the city onto the global market with a positive etiquette.

The overall proposal establishes a generic relation with the water, neglecting Liverpool marine heritage, moving the attention from the historic waterscape (with its centre in the Pier Head) to a new town brandscape. The entire city dematerializes, as a mere background of the new proposal.

The paper tries to evaluate the balance between branding strategies and related regeneration actions, also according to an analytical verification through a project: the proposal for a new tower in Shanghai waterfront, aimed to create a balance between the proposition of a successful and vibrant brandscape and the respect of geographical and historical factors.