

EUROZINE

24th European Meeting of Cultural Journals

Arrivals/Departures

European harbour cities as places of migration

Hamburg, 14–16 September 2012

THEMATIC OUTLINE

Following on from previous conferences, notably "European Histories" in 2009, the Hamburg meeting will aim to offer insights into another theatre of international, social and cultural confrontation: the harbour city.

Cities as territories of social development assume a logic of their own. How a city "ticks" -- the ideas that are generated in it, realized and, ultimately, accepted -- can be understood by looking at the city as an organism with a specific character or "emotional structure". This urban personality is captured in the cityscape and reproduced in everyday routines.

Harbour cities as places of movement, immigration and emigration, as places of inclusion and exclusion, develop various distinct modes of being that not only reflect different cultural traditions and political and social self-conceptions, but also contain economic potential and communicate how they see themselves as part of the larger structure that is "Europe". Gateways to the world or fortress Europe? Attached to harbour cities are all sorts of often contradictory metaphors that appear both to encourage movement and to restrict it. Local, national and global processes impose their mark on the development and self-understanding of this particular urban space.

The Hamburg conference will explore the question of how European societies deal variously with the cultural legacy of the "harbour city". Rightly associated with informality, cosmopolitanism and adventure, European harbour cities also bear the traces of a darker past: of colonialism, slavery and penal regimes. Securitized and militarized during the Cold War, in the twenty-first century harbours have been all but divested of human labour. Communities formerly dependent on the old port economy have disappeared to be replaced by a tertiary sector seeking the prestige and space of waterside locations. At the same time, harbours and their environs remain peripheral zones attracting migrants and others seeking out the shadows of surveillance society.