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New Neapolis: A Creative Teaming Up of Port Cities

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In January 2020, Rotterdam-based artist [Gyz La Rivière](#) released a new film project, entitled *New Neapolis*, in which he connects his Dutch hometown to three other European port cities: Liverpool, Marseille and Naples. Grouped together, they form 'New Neapolis', building on the ancient name of Naples that meant 'new city'. Following an earlier [book publication](#) of the same name, and accompanied by an [exhibition](#), La Rivière conceived New Neapolis as a metropolitan league that turns the national underdog position of all its members into an advantage. Compared to the stately capitals London, Paris and Rome, New Neapolis builds on the international network of the port cities and their inhabitants' traditional 'can do'-mentality to strive for a shared, utopian future.

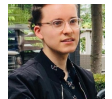
The film [New Neapolis](#) is as creative and entangled as the concept behind it. In his self-proclaimed role of 'visual archivist', La Rivière builds up the interlinkages among the four port cities by unearthing rather loose, but nevertheless striking associations, that are subsequently molded into an avalanche of audiovisual material. Collage techniques are used abundantly to adapt archival footage related to the socio-cultural past and present of the selected cities. In this way, a wide variety of subjects are strung together: the film for instance moves from the football star Maradona, whose career peaked in Naples, to the tragicomic animation character Calimero, and from popular Italian laundry racks with the name 'Rotterdam' to the world-famous Marseille soap. The artist brings his envisioned city cooperation to life through one long eclectic montage sequence, the aesthetics of which can especially appeal to younger, YouTube-influenced generations.

It is arguably also the more youthful segments of port cities' populations who might need a rich mix of media imagery to bring the port back into its hearts and minds. At a time when harbour activities have moved further away from city centres, municipal policymakers seem to struggle with (re-)connecting port and city functions. La Rivière has been able to overcome that gap, delivering a new approach that reintroduces and

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updates port city culture for the 21st century. *New Neapolis* is therefore not merely playful, but certainly also has strong political underpinnings.

If port cities have the ability to mutually tackle issues of economic, social or cultural nature, however, why did they not do so already in recent times? Does the global trade system, with its focus on competitiveness and rankings (for an apt manifestation of this latter tendency, see Menon Economics and DNV GL 2019), blindfold maritime hubs too much from their common interests? And if La Rivière's proposition to form a gang among these four cities materializes, what happens with other ports? At the end of the documentary, the artist suggests that many more port cities could join in the future. At a time when the European Union is faced with, among others, re-emerging waves of nationalist tendencies and a shifting economic world order, La Rivière proclaims in the film that his New Neapolis coalition is designed and equipped for an era 'in which cities are becoming more important than countries'. It makes the New Neapolis concept sound compelling and cutting-edge, and it fits an urban alliance that wants to tie the European continent back together by letting its maritime capitals join hands again.

Acknowledgement

This blog has been written in the context of discussions in the LDE PortCityFutures team, and the HERA Pleasurescapes project. It reflects the evolving thoughts among group members on the socio-spatial and cultural questions surrounding port city relationships. Thanks for comments and reviews to Paolo De Martino, Paul van de Laar and Carola Hein.

References

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Image: Film still from *New Neapolis* (Gyz La Rivière, 2020)

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