

**Article****An investigation into the repurposing of post-industrial waterfront spaces: The cases of the Baltic Triangle, Liverpool, and NDSM-werf, Amsterdam**

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**Abstract**

*The repurposing of post-industrial waterfront spaces in Western Europe following the decline of 20<sup>th</sup> century industrial dockland activity can be viewed as representative of broader transitions away from secondary-sector production-based economies and towards the industries associated with the tertiary sector. However, previous research relating specifically to such areas following the aforementioned changes, including assessment of the attitudes of those utilising the spaces, has been relatively sparse. Key questions regarding how to preserve cultural identity associated with heritage and regional history remain unanswered. The key study site was the Baltic Triangle area of Liverpool city centre, which has experienced a 'renaissance' in recent years following the success of independent businesses such as the Baltic Market. Comparisons are drawn with NDSM-werf in Amsterdam, a repurposed Dockland space in the north of Amsterdam which was dramatically transformed following industrial decline in that city. Similarities and differences between the two areas are assessed. The results of the survey reveal which locations within the Baltic Triangle area are most frequently visited, highlight general attitudes of visitors towards the area, and indicate which places within Liverpool are considered to possess 'Cultural Significance' according to those in the sample population of 108 individuals. Information obtained helps to reveal the key challenges which both areas face in the future. One possible way in which to safeguard cultural identity in NDSM may involve long-term leases on land with fixed conditions, as are currently in operation in the Baltic Triangle through the Baltic Creative company (CIC).*

**Keywords:** Post-industrial spaces, NDSM, Baltic Triangle, Tourist Perceptions of Space.

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## **Introduction**

Historically, the city of Liverpool was once amongst the most crucial ports in the United Kingdom. However, from the conclusion of the First World War in 1918 onwards, the city began to enter a state of industrial decline. Some of the key factors driving this change included the repositioned focus of trade from the North Atlantic to Europe, the reduced prevalence of traditional manufacturing industries, and the introduction of new technology for utilisation in port activities (most notably containerisation).

The rise of globalisation in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century coupled with a long-standing lack of economic diversification in Liverpool served to intensify the extent of the change which took place, with the end result being a dramatic rise in local unemployment levels: between 1971 and 1981, the unemployment rate of the city rose to 20.4% as the secondary sector industries which many workers had depended upon collapsed. (Speake and Fox, 2008). The Albert Dock was semi-derelict by the year 1960, and remained in this state until 1983, when the Merseyside Development corporation began one of the largest architectural conservation projects in UK history by converting the buildings for shop and office use (Sharples and Pollard, 2004).

The Baltic Triangle, located in Liverpool City centre, provides an excellent contemporary case study of a formerly derelict site which has now undergone a major transformation after a change in direction was instigated. Abandoned warehouses and other industrial-era structures (including the large Cain's brewery building) are now being utilised and inhabited by a variety of small local businesses. Included amongst the range of businesses are food vendors, bars, and small shops. Aside from these recreational businesses, there are also offices specialising in web design and similar services.

The NDSM project in Amsterdam is another example of a repurposed post-industrial urban waterfront area, which is now used primarily as an artistic space for creative expression. This researcher recently visited NDSM, and observed this unconventional approach to repurposing the shipyards there.

Florentina-Christina et al discuss the role of converting spaces associated with industrial heritage with specific focus upon Romania. They emphasise how the repurposing of disused industrial sites and buildings can achieve 'important cultural objectives' whilst simultaneously

generating economic productivity. Two case study they refer to as examples of ‘good practice’ in terms of regeneration are those of the Steam Locomotive Museum in the City of Sibiu and the Water Museum in Floresti commune. Both of these have been repurposed in order to capitalize upon the industrial sites in an increasingly post-industrial world.

The concept of public memory in association with cultural identity is discussed by Johnson (2004), who describes how the urban landscape itself acts as an emblem of power and memory in relation collective societal memories. This idea appears to be applicable in the cases of both the Baltic Triangle and NDSM, as both locations are representative of post-industrial legacies in Northern European port cities. Also noteworthy is Johnson’s reference to the ‘art of memory’, meaning the subjective, romanticized social histories which are often positioned at odds with more standardised objective histories, subject to empirical scrutiny.

Assessing the transformation of these areas in terms of cultural heritage and present-day utilisation, this research will explore how the people interacting with these spaces identify with the cultural aspects therein (if they do so at all). Of particular interest will be any interpretation of symbolism and possible representations of the past within the contemporary surroundings and socioeconomic context.

Previous research has strongly indicated that cultural regeneration, when deployed effectively as part of a wider urban planning strategy, has the capacity to significantly restore and improve the quality of human lives, particularly in areas suffering from degeneration. The role of urban design and the use of space has been regarded as essential to the success of endeavours such as this, with some researchers going as far as to suggest that culture be adopted as an ‘organising principle for city management and urban design’ to a near-universal degree (Wansborough and Mageean 2000). Such regeneration efforts integrate elements such as public art and developed cultural activity into the design of cities, to a variety of extents in different cases.

### **The Baltic Triangle Area**

The Baltic Triangle Area was formerly a disused post-industrial space close to the Liverpool Waterfront, containing many shipping warehouses which were until recently empty. The historic Cain’s Brewery, which was left abandoned once production there ceased, is also situated in this area.

Over the past few years, this space has been gradually undergoing a transformation following the involvement of the 'Independent Liverpool' group, which aims to establish the area as a new hub for the creative industries in Liverpool.

At present, the space is dominated by independently run businesses which operate collectively as a form of business community across the Baltic Triangle Area. The property management business Baltic Creative CIC is one example of a company which is responsible for letting some of the sites in this area to small independent businesses. Research was mainly focused around the South Easterly section of the Baltic Triangle Area, between Jamaica Street and St James Street, which is where some of the most high-profile businesses in the triangle (such as the Baltic Market and Camp in Furnace) are located.

### **NDSM-werf**

NDSM-werf is located on a former Dock site to the north of the IJ and Amsterdam City Centre. This Dock site was originally developed during the 1920's, at a time when the Oosternberg Shipyard was no longer capable of fulfilling its purpose effectively due to its relatively small size.

NDSM stands for 'Nederlandse Scheepsbouw en Droogdok Maatschappij' which translates to 'The Dutch Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company', the company that owned and ran the Dock site upon until its closure in 1979 following a prolonged period of various economic shifts and reorganisations (largely involving the movement of the shipping trade so that it was focused eastwards). Rough Guides (2017) recounts how very 'little was demolished' in the aftermath of the closure, thereby creating the opportunity to revive the location as a hub for arts and events, utilising the 'distressed' industrial structures.

Amsterdam fund for the Arts subsidises the foundation 300,000 euros per year, and is guaranteed to continue doing so until 2020. After that point, the future of the creative project appears less certain. Amsterdam's 'Towards 2025' city plan calls for some 1,300 homes to be built at NDSM-werf by that year, massively increasing the local resident population. This has the potential to introduce conflict, as local authorities may soon view the land occupied by NDSM as a valuable commodity which would benefit the local economy if utilised differently (NDSM, 2017).

Chris Keulemans is a writer journalist and teacher, who was previously a program maker and later a director of De Balie, the centre of culture and politics in Amsterdam. As part of his role as chronicler of Amsterdam Noord (the area of Amsterdam North of the River IJ of which NDSM is a part), Keulemans has closely followed developments in that area of the city since 2001.

In his essay ‘Chinese Water Torture and the Emancipation of the Artist’, published in the 2017 edition of the NDSM OPEN Newspaper (released on the Tenth Anniversary of the Art city and primarily focused on this topic), Keulemans describes how ‘There is no place in Amsterdam where the city’s logic and the artists dream understand each other so badly’ as they do in the case of the Kunststad. He goes on to recount how changes in leadership at the NDSM foundation have seen individuals such as Eva de Klerk, Frank Anselma and Kim Tuin all have a turn at directing the the NDSM project, and notes the similarities shared by their respective visions for the future.

*‘All three did not limit themselves to the Warehouse or to the NDSM terrain. They saw the wharf as a laboratory for the city as a whole. Arts, industrial heritage, free space, economy, technology and hospitality – they wanted to arrange and connect these very differently than is currently the practice. They didn’t believe in the holy logic of vacant site – artists – gentrification’.*

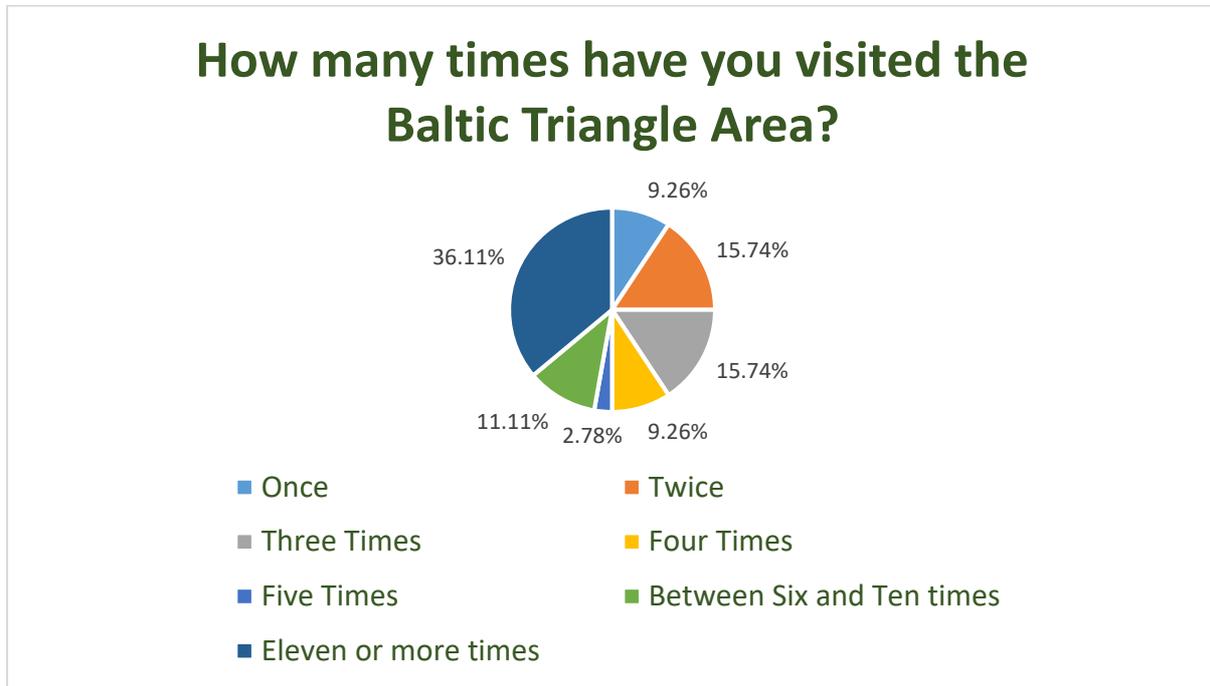
-Chris Keulemans, writing for NDSM OPEN

His description of how vacant sites are frequently gentrified following the introduction of artistic expression to a locale can be compared with related to similar comments which have been unearthed through interviews conducted within the Baltic Triangle in Liverpool.

### **Baltic Triangle Survey Results: Quantitative data**

Investigation into the number of times those questioned had visited the Baltic Triangle revealed that more than a third of the sample (39 individuals) claim to have visited the Baltic Triangle eleven or more times. This suggests that they are regular customers/patrons of at least some of the businesses based there. 23.15% of the sample (15 individuals) could be considered semi-regular visitors to the area, having visited between four and ten times. The remaining 40.74%

of the sample (44 individuals) had visited the area only once, twice or three times. These can be considered to be non-regular visitors.

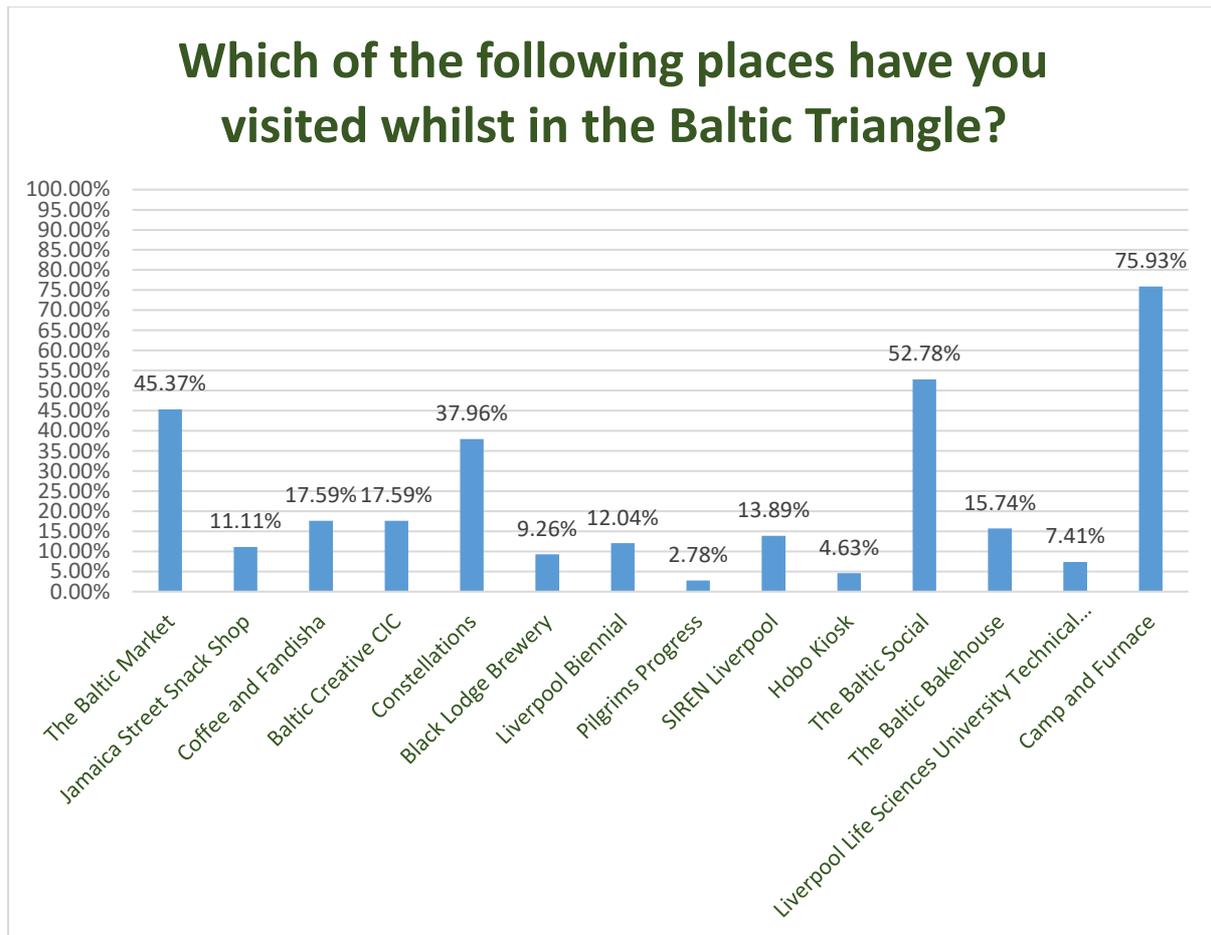


Based upon the responses to the question of which places within the Baltic Market respondents had visited, it can be determined that the four most popular locations are:

- The Baltic Market
- Constellations,
- The Baltic Social
- Camp and Furnace

All of these locations are bars/restaurants capable of hosting events with large gatherings of people.

More than 3/4's of the sample (82 individuals) had visited Camp and Furnace, making that business the most popular by a significant margin. Other businesses were less popular by comparison, although it should be noted that even in the case of the least visited location (Pilgrims Progress), 3 individuals out of the 108 in the sample had visited.



In terms of quality ratings, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive for the most part, with 82.41% of the sample (79 individuals) rating the area at either four or five stars.

A further 13.89% (15 individuals) rated the area at three stars.

A very small minority had a mostly negative view of the area, with 1.85% of the sample (2 individuals) rating the area at two stars, and the same proportion offering a one-star rating.

These figures suggest that the vast majority of those who visit the area have positive feelings regarding the Baltic Triangle.

When asked to select which places in Liverpool they considered to possess ‘Cultural Significance’, individual respondents frequently voted for several of the available choices. Therefore, even the place which was considered to not be culturally significant by the largest proportion of people (The Liverpool Playhouse Theatre) was nevertheless deemed to be culturally significant by 53.70% of the sample (58 individuals). The tendency for respondents to consider multiple places within Liverpool to be culturally significant suggests that the

majority of the sample population believe that Liverpool as a city is culturally significant overall.

The results of the survey indicate that the Albert Dock is most popularly considered to be a 'Culturally Significant' location out of all the places listed, with 94.44% of the sample population (102 individuals) identifying it as such. 5.55% more of the sample (6 individuals) voted for the Albert Dock than voted for St George's Hall.

Despite being a very new addition to the urban landscape in Liverpool, the Baltic Triangle received more votes in support of the idea that it possesses cultural significance than the Empire Theatre, Liverpool Playhouse Theatre and The Beatles Museum.

In terms of demographics, the majority of respondents (72.22%) were residents of Merseyside. However, out of the 30 individuals who were not Merseyside residents, 21 claimed they had visited Liverpool with the intention of visiting the Baltic Triangle. This would appear to suggest that the Baltic Triangle has the potential to act as a pull-factor, attracting visitors from beyond the boundaries of Merseyside to visit Liverpool.

Based on this data collected it appears that the Baltic Triangle is visited by people from a variety of age groups. However, the age group of 26-35 year olds was the largest within the sample, accounting for just over 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the total respondents. It should also be noted that no individuals over the age of 76 chose to participate in this research. 101 of the 108 people questioned surveyed chose to provide information about where they had travelled from to visit the Baltic Triangle.

The largest category of visitors was that consisting of visitors from Merseyside suburbs away from the city centre (45 individuals), with the second largest category being Liverpool city centre residents (28 individuals). One of the individuals surveyed actually lived within the Baltic Triangle area itself. 14 respondents were from the Wirral area, whilst a further 8 respondents were residents of the neighbouring counties Cheshire and Lancashire. The remaining 6 individuals came from locations elsewhere in England, including Wolverhampton, Worcester and London.

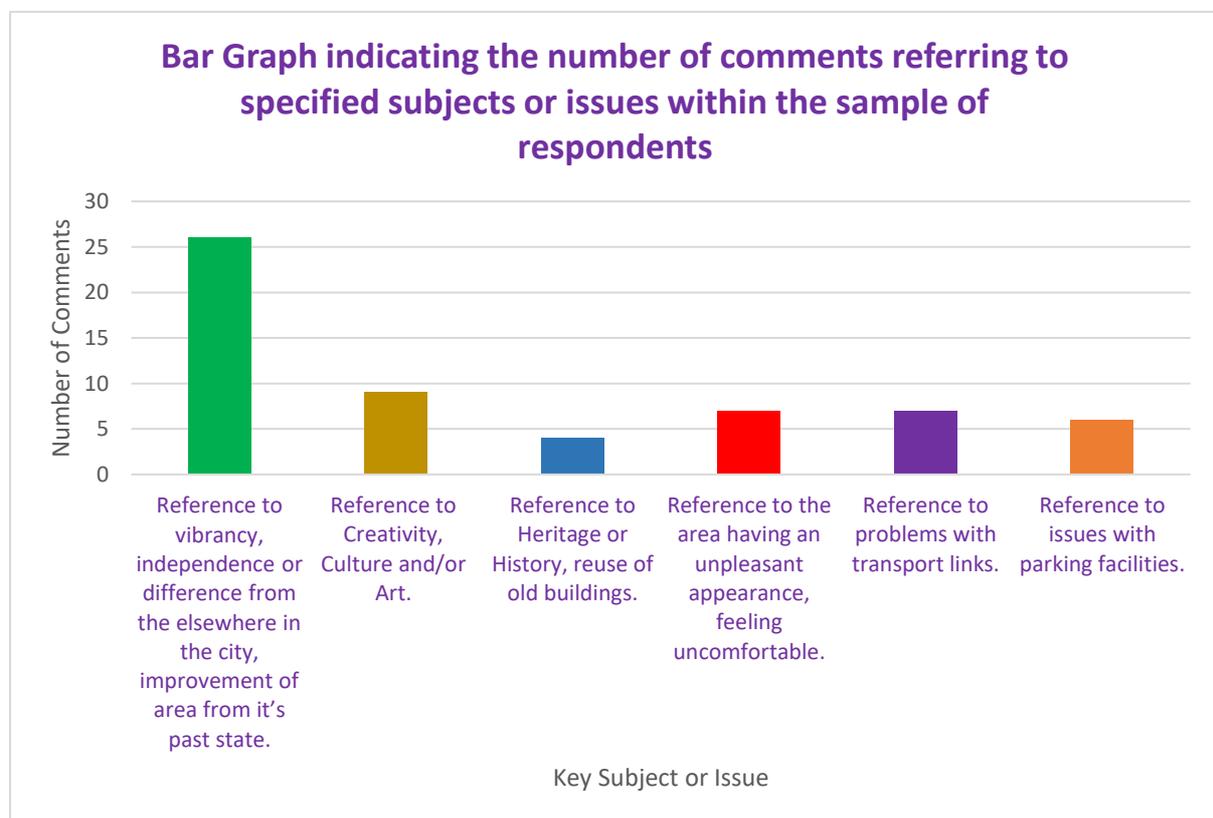
## Data Analysis

Stratification of the Survey respondent population according to age can be used to gain additional insight into patterns of behaviour and attitudes towards the perceived Cultural significance of specific Geographic sites.

The age group 66-75 years was excluded from the following analysis by stratification on the grounds that it only included 2 respondents and was therefore too small to give a suitably proportionate representation of that age group as a whole.

The age group 56-65 only included 6 respondents, and therefore should not be viewed as an especially accurate representation of that age group, but is nevertheless included to offer an impression of the information obtained from this small group. It is because of this small size that comparisons and contrasts between the 56-65 group and the younger age groups (containing more respondents) have been deliberately avoided.

Out of the options presented, the Baltic Triangle is not the most widely viewed as being a ‘Culturally Significant’ place. However, it is not the place which is least widely recognised as possessing ‘Cultural Significance’ either. 66.67% of Respondents (approximately 2/3rds of the total respondent population) indicated that they do believe the Baltic Triangle possesses Cultural Significance.



The graph above calculates how frequently the previously identified subjects or issues appeared across the sample of 40 comments (all of which addressed at least one of the aforementioned subjects or issues). References to the vibrant or unique aspects of the Baltic Triangle Area, including those references to improvement across the area when compared with its past state, were found in 26 comments. This indicates that many visitors have a similar (if not necessarily identical) perception of the local identity of the area. Additionally, 9 of the 40 individuals whose comments were utilised for this analysis made reference to Creativity, Culture and Art, with the Murals by Mr Curtis often mentioned in relation to this.

In terms of negatives, 7 of the 40 individuals described the area as appearing unpleasant, with some suggesting that they feel uncomfortable or unsafe there. The same number referred to problems with transport links, whilst 6 of those questioned claimed that a lack of parking facilities was a problem in the Baltic Triangle. The Baltic Creative CIC website echoes some of the ideas that Irony expressed:

*'It started with a group of visionaries, local likeminded voices who wanted to find a way to stop the displacement of creative and digital businesses by market forces. They were sick of seeing history repeating itself decade after decade – creative companies and artists moving into areas for their cheap rents, gradually revitalising them, then being forced out when profit-driven developers eventually take over.'*

- *Baltic Creative CIC Website*

Lee's, Slater and Wyly (2008) explain how the term 'gentrification' originated as an ironic phrase utilised by the Marxist British Sociologist Ruth Glass in her 1964 book '*London: Aspects of Change*'. Through reference to 'gentrification' (or 'gentry-fication'), Glass was signalling the appearance of a new 'urban gentry', who would replace the existing population as the area in question underwent transformation. Whilst the impact of gentrification upon the lives of existing residents is highly significant when assessing the overall success of urban redevelopment, in the case of this research the primary concern is instead the impact that the process can have upon the cultural landscape. One example of a planned residential development which could be linked to Gentrification in the Baltic Triangle Area is St James Court, a £30 million luxury apartment building containing 157 individual apartments. Richard Caton of the Developers 'Pinnacle Alliance' has been quoted as suggesting that the building

was constructed in response to ‘demand for high quality accommodation surging as young professionals move to the city’.

Irony has also painted artwork in NDSM, Amsterdam. He explained how he had painted near to a squat named ‘Villa Friekens’, which was nearby to NDSM wharf. Describing the situation there, he spoke of how good rates on the unused land there had allowed the squatters to enter into an agreement with the landlord. As many of the squatters stayed there for a long time, they began to invest in the area and thereby contributed towards it’s transformation.

## **Conclusions**

In the cases of both the Baltic Triangle Area and NDSM-werf, radical changes regarding how post-industrial spaces are utilised have resulted in the landscapes being transformed. The repurposing of both areas can confidently be described as Successful within the context of the short-term (that is to say, in the years immediately following the initial efforts to repurpose the abandoned spaces). However, the question of well each enterprise shall fare in the long-term is a somewhat more complex one to answer. Based upon the information gathered through this research, it is possible to reach a number of conclusions relating to the success of the cultural regeneration in the Baltic Triangle Area, and also which aspects appear to be the most economically sustainable. These conclusions are outlined below.

The results of the survey showed that the average rating of the quality of the Baltic Triangle Area for the entire population of respondents was 4 stars out of a possible five, indicating that most visitors were largely satisfied with the area, although some problems remained.

When attempting to reach a conclusion regarding the extent of the successful cultural regeneration that has taken place in the Baltic Triangle Area, it is important to firstly review the responses of the visitors who participated in the survey. Out of the options presented, the Baltic Triangle is not the most widely viewed as being a ‘Culturally Significant’ place. However, it is not the place which is least widely recognised as possessing ‘Cultural Significance’ either. 66.7% of survey respondents (approximately 2/3rds of the participant population) indicated that they considered the Baltic Triangle Area to be a place which possesses ‘Cultural Significance’. After classifying the responses via age group, it can be observed that in every individual age group from ages ‘16-25’ to ages ‘56-65’, more than 55%

of respondents agreed that the Baltic Triangle area possessed 'Cultural Significance'. This appears to suggest that the majority of visitors, across all of the specified age ranges, believe that the Baltic Triangle Area has cultural value within the context of inner-city Liverpool.

It appears reasonable to conclude that it is possible to regenerate, repurpose and thereby revitalise post-industrial waterfront spaces whilst also ensuring the protection of the local culture and heritage which is rooted within these areas. Indeed, the survey data collected within the Baltic Triangle appears to lend credence to the idea that most visitors recognise the existence of culture within that space and understand that the area possesses some form of cultural value. This can be linked back to the concept of 'Cultural Capital': in addition to being considered 'cultural' the Baltic Triangle also received a high average quality rating. These attributes likely represent some of the factors which have resulted in the tendency of many of those questioned to visit the area on multiple occasions. 36.11% of the visitors in the sample claimed to have visited 'Eleven or more times', indicating the existence of a sizeable group willing to provide continuous regular custom to the businesses based there. This has positive implications for further stability and possible growth in the local economy of the Baltic Triangle area. The four most popular of the places listed were the large social venues: The Baltic Market, The Baltic social, Camp and Furnace and Constellations. Evidently, the night time economy described by Mr Chris Green is undoubtedly a major source of income for the Baltic Triangle.

NDSM-werf and the Baltic Triangle are both 'fields of cultural production' of the kind described by Bourdieu (1993). Street artists are active in both of these spaces, including both official artists who are commissioned to paint (such as Paul Curtis) and those with no direct financial motivations whatsoever. Additionally, the NDSM-fuse exhibition space represents a new manner in which various aspects of culture and heritage can be reproduced, displayed and passed on to others.

Securing the future of NDSM-werf whilst preserving the essential components which have come to define the area over the past twenty years appears to be a major challenge which will not be easy to overcome. The many unanswered questions regarding the future of the NDSM-werf (as emphasised by Payton in her interview) seem to imply a lack of clarification regarding the direction of the project moving forward, and this will likely prove to be an impediment to the area in the long term. However, the common denominator shared by many of the most

pressing issues appears relatively straightforward to identify: funding, or rather a lack thereof. The most obvious key to addressing this would require a greater extent of financial independency for NDSM, and it is with regard to achieving this that inspiration could potentially be drawn from the Baltic Triangle Area.

NDSM-werf undoubtedly possesses a large amount of ‘Cultural Capital’ of the kind described by Miles (2007) but the manner in which this Capital is utilised for financial gain is arguably not as efficient as it has the potential to be. One possible method which could be used to maximise income and boost the local economy would be to shift emphasis towards the types of Businesses which have proven to be popular with visitors in the Baltic Market. Survey results indicate that a large proportion of visitors have visited large events venues with catering services and bars (such as the Baltic Market and Camp and furnace), and the data collected also suggests that approximately 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of respondents visited the area enough times for their attendance to be considered ‘regular’, implying a steady and stable supply of custom. Evening events are integral to the success of the ‘night time economy’ as described by Chris Green.

There is certainly sufficient space currently unutilised on NDSM-werf to launch similar businesses there. Arguably, the current plans to build a new restaurant within the Kunststad could be viewed as a potential start-point for such developments. However, additional factors would have to be taken into account in the case of Amsterdam, which already possesses a vast ‘night time economy’ concentrated in the city centre south of the River IJ. Such immense competition might prevent a large Catering and Bar venue on NDSM from attracting sufficient. Conversely, however, the existence of such venues could act to draw more visitors to NDSM than would otherwise have travelled there, and thereby increase the level of exposure the area receives.

The deployment of long-term leases of local property via companies such as Baltic Creative CIC appears to represent a viable method of ensuring that small independent businesses specialising in the creative industries can maintain a presence in the Baltic Triangle Area. Crucial to these protections of the creative industries are the specific legal conditions which limit how Baltic Creative CIC is permitted to operate, preventing the company from letting any of the properties within the Baltic Triangle to any businesses existing outside of a well defined remit. This approach, in which a private, for-profit company operates in a manner not entirely unlike a trust, strikes a balance in which the distinct local identity of an area can be preserved,

whilst simultaneously allowing the economy based on the creative sector to run efficiently. As Baltic Creative CIC is one of the largest stakeholders in the Baltic Triangle Area, the company is incentivised to reinvest and thereby support the continuous regeneration and related development throughout that part of the inner city. Is it possible to apply a similar model based around a for-profit business in the case of NDSM? It seems possible, and the comments in NDSM OPEN regarding a lack of overall direction could be addressed by a profit-driven approach which nevertheless places value on unconventional land uses such as the Kunststad. Further research could explore this avenue more fully to accurately determine whether this approach is fully viable in the case of NDSM.

This may represent a pathway towards achieving long-term economic sustainability across NDSM-werf, which may assist in the preservation of that space and its Cultural Identity and protect the area from the more undesirable impacts which typically occur in the latter stages of the urban gentrification process. This could allow NDSM-werf to follow more directly in the footprints of successful ventures elsewhere in Europe where cultural objectives are achieved alongside economic productivity, such as the kind described by Florentina-Christina (2014) et al. If handled correctly, this could prove beneficial to those individuals and businesses already active across NDSM, whilst providing additional business opportunities that would not damage the cultural integrity which is a key aspect of NDSM-werf.

**Appendix:**



**Picture 1:** Map of NDSM displayed near the entrance to the Kunststadt, showing the layout of NDSM-werf and surrounding area.



**Picture 2:** A graffiti artist painting outside the Kunststadt.



**Picture 3:** ‘Wings’ artwork by Paul Curtis, on Jamaica Street in the Baltic Triangle.



**Picture 4:** Colourful artwork surrounding the entrance to “Coffee and Fandisha’ a small business operating in the Baltic Triangle.

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