

Regional Studies Association Research Network on Infrastructural Regionalism (NOIR) Event Report

NOIR Workshop on Port Regionalism
8-9 June 2026, Antwerp, Belgium

Ports are more than nodes in global supply chains. International shipping ports, airports, and inland intermodal terminals are placed infrastructures that anchor regional economies, mediate flows of goods, people, and capital, and shape territorial imaginaries. As liminal spaces, they are gateways and checkpoints that connect regions to transnational networks while simultaneously reinforcing regulatory, spatial, and socio-political boundaries. Through the lens of 'infrastructural regionalism', this workshop explores how port spaces are produced, contested, and governed, how they emerge not only from the demands of logistics management but also from regional planning, labor mobilization, securitization and regulation, and environmental conditions. Through extended portscapes, places can be abruptly linked (or truncated) by networks and forces across incredible distances, opened to economic opportunity and subject to environment degradation. Regional spaces and regional futures are defined in relation, or response, to such infrastructures across both space and time. In this workshop and planned special issue, we therefore asked:

- How do regionalization processes create and sustain port spaces?
- How do port cities and their surrounding regions co-evolve through infrastructure?
- What kinds of futures are imagined, promised, or denied through port development?

The international port regionalism workshop followed a roundtable format. Invited participants were asked to circulate draft papers (c.5-6,000 words) in advance of the workshop so that they could be discussed collectively when we came together in Antwerp. This paper length allowed authors to outline their research questions, methods, empirical analysis, and key findings (as appropriate). Participants did *not* present their individual papers. Instead, each paper was assigned two discussants who summarized the paper's arguments and provided feedback to the authors, followed by an open-floor discussion. Papers were grouped into five thematic sessions in which each paper was allotted approximately 30 minutes, structured as follows:

- Discussant 1: 3-minute summary of the paper + comments (10 minutes max)
- Discussant 2: Comments only (5 minutes max)
- Author: Brief response (5 minutes max)
- Open-floor group discussion: 10 minutes

We utilized this format to ensure workshop participants could substantively *workshop* their papers through generative discussion, deep engagement, and meaningful intellectual exchange, while also fostering the development of collaborative, collective outputs.

The workshop was therefore designed to expand and deepen collective understanding of diverse port infrastructures, their governance arrangements, and their evolving regional entanglements. It convened scholars examining the planning, governance, and maintenance of contemporary portscapes alongside

researchers engaged with the NOIR network's work on infrastructural regionalism. By bringing these communities together, the event fostered an interdisciplinary dialogue on the regional dynamics and political processes shaping port cities and their surrounding territories. Discussions emphasized the ways in which port cities and their peripheries function as spaces where regionalization processes are simultaneously forged and fractured. Participants examined how infrastructural investment and disinvestment, logistics networks, and everyday socio-spatial practices contribute to the production of regional port geographies. Through this engagement, the workshop advanced NOIR's objective of strengthening analytical connections between port and logistics studies, critical infrastructure research, and regional governance scholarship.

The NOIR port regionalism workshop was attended by 24 participants in person with one participant joining virtually. The event demonstrated substantial international reach, drawing contributors from nine countries: Belgium, France, Georgia, Hong Kong, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This geographic diversity reflects the broad relevance of research on port regionalism and infrastructural regionalism and underscores the workshop's role in convening a global community of scholars engaged in the research at the port-region interface.

Workshop participants were recruited through an open call for papers disseminated across multiple academic listservs and through the NOIR Research Network mailing list. This broad circulation ensured wide visibility across the scholarly communities engaged in port and logistics studies, critical infrastructure studies, spatial planning, and infrastructural regionalism. In addition to the open call, the organizing team issued targeted invitations to network members who had contributed to previous NOIR-affiliated conference sessions, thereby maintaining continuity with earlier initiatives while expanding the network's reach. The recruitment strategy was designed to support both disciplinary diversity and methodological breadth, reflecting NOIR's commitment to fostering interdisciplinary dialogue on regional infrastructure governance. We gave particular attention to achieving a balance between early-career researchers and established scholars. This was intended to strengthen the workshop's intellectual depth, promote mentorship and exchange across career stages, and ensure that the event contributed meaningfully to the development of emerging scholarship within the NOIR network.

Overview of the program

Welcome

Thomas Vanoutrive, Urban Studies Institute, University of Antwerp

Port Regionalism

Jean-Paul Addie, Georgia State University; **Michael Glass**, University of Pittsburgh; **Jen Nelles**, Oxford Brookes University

SESSION 1: Port Ecology and Metabolism

Situating the politics of extended urbanization: The ecological compensation landscapes in the port of Antwerp

Ioannis Tzaninis, **Koenraad Danneels**, **Stijn Oosterlynck**, University of Antwerp

Port Regionalism Beyond the Port: Metabolic Infrastructures and Territorial Imaginaries

Annabelle Duval, Delft University of Technology

Reconfiguring port regions through energy transition: Spatial transformations and regional reordering in Gela and Ravenna, Italy

Leonardo Ramondetti (virtual), Politecnico di Torino

SESSION 2: Corridors and Territories

The techno-politics of port expansion: interrogating the logics of connectivity
Jonathan Silver, Yannis Kallianos, Zhengli Huang, University of Sheffield

Distant neighbours: Staging an impossible dialogue between two Black Sea ports
Esma Berikishvili, Ilia State University

What's at stake in downloading the Belt and Road?: From the development of port infrastructures to regional reconfiguration of Eastern Poland
Wojciech Kęłowski, Hong Kong University

SESSION 3: Logistics and Governance

Whither port geography?
Karel Van den Berghe, Delft University of Technology

Port, city and region: Land use policies, spatio-temporal mismatch and governance dilemmas in the case of Hamburg, Germany
Markus Hesse, University of Luxembourg

Logistical land scarcity and spatial justice in the making of a metropolitan port region: Infrastructural regionalism along the Seine Axis
Adeline Heitz, Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers (CNAM)

SESSION 4: Labor and Contestation

Comparing mega-port governance: Ecology, labor, and grassroots activism
Peter Kimani, Adriane Takahara Montenegro, University of Antwerp

From connectivity to connectability: Corridor-making and de-/valuation in port regions
Alberto Valz Gris, Politecnico di Torino

Feminisation or automation? Labour restructuring and contradictory futures on the waterfront: Evidence from Felixstowe, United Kingdom
Marie Lécuyer, Université Paul-Valéry - Montpellier 3 (UPVM)

SESSION 5 Entanglements and Futures

Maritime port development as territorial (re-)negotiation: dissecting the arrival of China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative in Zeebrugge, Belgium
Douwe de Jong, Vrije Universiteit Brussel; **Wojciech Kęłowski**, Hong Kong University

Disconnections and entanglements: Renewing the port-urban interface through Mombasa's regional portscape
Zhengli Huang, University of Sheffield

Inter-referencing Indian Ocean futures: Djibouti's regional port infrastructure
Michael Glass, University of Pittsburgh

Wrap Up and Next Steps Session

Jean-Paul Addie, Georgia State University; **Michael Glass**, University of Pittsburgh; **Jen Nelles**, Oxford Brookes University

In addition to time for informal conversation in coffee breaks between sessions, an event dinner was held on June 8th at RAS, a restaurant located on the recently renovated Scheldt River quays and overlooking the river and port.



Taking advantage of the workshop's location in Antwerp, the event concluded with a two-hour guided boat tour of the Port of Antwerp. The Port of Antwerp has constituted a critical node in global trade networks since the Middle Ages. Over more than eight centuries, it has transformed from a modest riverine facility into one of the world's pre-eminent maritime gateways. Today, the port spans 12,068 hectares making it the largest contiguous port area worldwide. Its operations engage a workforce of 150,000 people, whose collective efforts underpin the port's ongoing development and its strategic commitment to a prosperous, resilient, and sustainable regional future.



The RSA NOIR workshop on port regionalism offered a focused opportunity to mobilize and interrogate NOIR's broader research agenda for regionalizing the infrastructural turn in concrete, empirically grounded terms. By centering critical port infrastructures—an infrastructural domain the network had not yet explicitly examined—the workshop enabled participants to test, refine, and extend NOIR's conceptual commitments through situated case studies and comparative dialogue. This thematic focus made it possible to explore how port infrastructures, governance arrangements, and regional entanglements illuminate the complexities of infrastructural regionalism.

The perspectives assembled at the workshop were grounded in two of NOIR's core assertions. First, interdisciplinary dialogue across critical infrastructure studies is both generative and necessary for understanding the complexities of infrastructural regionalism. Second, scholars must hold in constant analytical tension the governance of infrastructure across jurisdictional boundaries, the varied capacities of actors to “see like a region,” and the everyday practices of lived regionalism that shape how infrastructural regions are experienced, contested, and reproduced. These commitments provided a conceptual anchor for the workshop's discussions and helped situate port regionalism within broader debates about infrastructure, territory, and regional governance.



A central strength of the workshop was the deliberate space it created for substantive intellectual exchange among researchers working from diverse analytical traditions, across multiple scales, and in varied global contexts. The research panels facilitated reflective conversations that traversed conceptual, methodological, and political vantage points, allowing participants to interrogate assumptions and identify productive tensions. The innovation-workshop format further ensured sustained engagement: presenters

remained actively involved throughout the sessions, enabling deep, iterative dialogue and providing contributors with meaningful feedback on their draft papers. This structure reinforced NOIR's commitment to collaborative knowledge production and to cultivating interdisciplinary conversations that advance critical infrastructure studies.

The workshop highlighted how port regionalism is actively reconfiguring contemporary port-city relations through the transformation of port infrastructures, evolving governance arrangements, and increasingly regionalized entanglements. Yet a persistent paradox emerged: port authorities themselves are rarely regional. Ports operate through multi-scalar, multi-actor governance, but regional governance remains the weakest link. Inland logistics hubs and distribution centers are typically sited through local real-estate logics rather than coordinated regional planning, producing a governance mismatch in which regional impacts emerge without corresponding regional institutions capable of addressing them. This gap underscores the need for analytical approaches that can capture the relational and territorial complexities of port-infrastructure systems.

Participants emphasized that ports and their hinterlands tend to function as regions produced through flows, corridors, logistics networks, and interdependencies rather than through formal political boundaries. Understanding portscales therefore requires learning to see “like a region”—to apprehend the infrastructural, socio-ecological, and economic dynamics that exceed municipal or national jurisdictions. Crucially, infrastructural regions are not only sites of global connectivity, trade, and capital; they are also arenas of protest, counter-geographies, and everyday life. Bringing NOIR's thematic attention to regional lives into port regionalism offers a productive pathway for integrating social movements, everyday resistance, and distributive justice into the analytical core of port-infrastructure research.

Overall, the workshop illuminated the deep interconnections between infrastructure, governance, and global economic systems as they are assembled through regional port spaces. It showcased the transformative potential of port infrastructures while also revealing the tensions, contradictions, and uneven impacts embedded in their development and management. The discussions underscored that port infrastructure is never merely physical; it is political, economic, and social, shaping regional and global landscapes in profound ways. By foregrounding these dynamics, the workshop advanced NOIR's agenda and opened new avenues for theorizing and researching infrastructural regionalism through the lens of port systems.

Future Events

The NOIR workshop on port regionalism catalyzed a wide-ranging interdisciplinary conversation at the intersection of infrastructural regionalism, port and logistics studies, critical infrastructure studies, and spatial planning research. By bringing these communities into dialogue, the workshop advanced NOIR's commitment to developing analytically rich and empirically grounded approaches to understanding how regional dynamics shape, and are shaped by, contemporary port infrastructures. The discussions demonstrated how port regionalism offers a productive lens for examining multi-scalar governance, territorial reconfiguration, and the socio-technical systems that underpin global circulation.

Looking ahead, NOIR's leadership team will continue collaborating closely with workshop contributors to refine and extend the working papers presented during the event. This collective effort will culminate in a special issue proposal to be submitted to the RSA journal *Regional Studies* by August 2026. Following proposal submission, contributors will receive editorial feedback on revised papers throughout Fall 2026, enabling iterative refinement and conceptual sharpening across the set of manuscripts. The timeline anticipates full paper submissions by Summer 2027, ensuring that the special issue reflects both the intellectual momentum generated by the workshop and the rigorous scholarly development required for publication.