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The Metropolitan Bay: Spatial Imaginary of Imperial St. Petersburg and Maritime Heritage of the Gulf of Finland

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Received: 2 December 2018; Accepted: 19 February 2019; Published: 26 February 2019



Abstract: The paper aims to discuss the multifaceted links between the marine environment of the Gulf of Finland and the representations of the large complex of cultural heritage related to the city of St. Petersburg. The paper is based on a spatial imaginary of Greater St. Petersburg as the cultural and technological unity of the city and adjacent waterscapes in the times of the Russian Empire. This concept is instrumental to see the historical links between the parts of the heritage complex that has by now disintegrated and has been separated by state borders.

Keywords: Baltic; Gulf of Finland; coastal heritage; St. Petersburg; spatial imaginaries

1. Introduction

The paper discusses the multifaceted links between the marine environment of the Gulf of Finland and creation, representation, and perception of the numerous vestiges of maritime heritage left behind in the city of St. Petersburg. This maritime heritage is tightly connected with the spatial imaginary of the Gulf of Finland as a space of *Greater St. Petersburg*, as the Gulf itself had been culturally and technologically connected to a former capital of the Russian Empire. We follow the definition of spatial imaginary as a collective or individual understanding of space produced in association with the practices of living in that space. Spatial imaginaries are going beyond the pure representations because they can structure and co-constitute social practices and have material effects due to particular organization of physical space and creation of cultural landscape that produce heritage sites.

Many landscapes and sites in the borderland regions of the Gulf of Finland could be described as a cultural palimpsest, a concept recently applied to such sites and landscapes as an analogy with a palimpsest as a paleographic object created by the recycling of parchments of vellum used for writing books in the medieval period. In the metaphorical model of the analogy to a palimpsest “it is never a pure coincidence of what texts are superimposed on each other because the succession of layers always mirrors the broader context of historical change” (Kinossian and Wråkberg 2017, pp. 90–91). This statement is also applicable to a situation when historians and heritage scholars make an attempt to reveal a meaning that lies beneath the most visible ones. The general discussion about the influence of the common past on heritage sites in the regions recently separated by the state borders is fully applicable to the large part of the Gulf of Finland region as well (Wråkberg 2014, pp. 161–69). However, the meanings and imaginaries related to the common imperial past, although often less visible than more recent Soviet past, applicable at least partly to this territory, are more profound, as they embrace the entirety of the bay. This is, certainly, just one layer in the long history of the region, but from imperial St. Petersburg significant historical heritage remained on the coast that needs to be better understood as a unity in its relationship with the marine space and environment.

This discussion of maritime and coastal heritage is based on the approach adopted by maritime heritage practitioners who look at coastal heritage as “not so much of maritime heritage

per se as of the way in which it is being constructed and used today, i.e., patrimonialisation processes, or the social construction of maritime heritage” (Alegret and Carbonell 2014, p. 13). The recently developed cultural concept of *maritimity* as describing close relations between the marine environment and the coastal communities that identify themselves as “maritime” also enriches our perspective (Ransley 2011, pp. 896–97). Indeed, we completely agree with Ann Day and Ken Lunn, who argued that the significant shift in the scope of the maritime history that took place in the late 20th–early 21st centuries inevitably leads to the reconsideration of the maritime heritage through the new and much wider understanding of the very notions of both “maritime” and “heritage” (Day and Lunn 2003, pp. 289–91). As a result, the idea of *maritimity* serves as a useful heuristic tool that permits the study of the complex interactions between the “the sea and its narratives, representations, materialities” and so on, on the one hand, and the coastal dwellers who “use heritage to build or repair their personal and collective maritime bonds” on the other (Andrews 2010, p. 3). We argue that geographic imaginaries are a crucially important part of this story of multifaceted human interaction with the sea.

The contemporary spatial imaginary of the Gulf of Finland was recreated several times: with the end of the Russian Empire (1721–1917); then, in the Soviet Union, with its distinct heritage policy that neglected many sites related to imperial history, while highlighting others; and again, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Such a history of spatial imagination to a great extent determines the means of observation, perception, and description of heritage in an area, including a maritime one. State borders that appeared, disappeared, and re-appeared during the twentieth century are crucial for representation and perception of that heritage. Moreover, the border between Russia and the European Union that is now situated in the Eastern Baltic means that heritage sites are governed by very different political and administrative systems and through different heritage strategies.

However, the 2015 Namur declaration stressed that the European heritage strategy for the twenty-first century “should promote a shared and unifying approach to cultural heritage management, based on an effective legal framework for the integrated conservation of heritage” in order to achieve its priorities: “the contribution of heritage to the improvement of European citizens’ quality of life and living environment; the contribution of heritage to Europe’s attractiveness and prosperity; education and lifelong training; participatory governance in the heritage field”.¹ These aims require specially designed approaches to the consideration and description of the heritage. Eventually, the European strategies provided modern guidelines for developing a complex vision of apparently separated heritage sites even though a significant part of them are situated outside the direct control of the European Union’s administrative bodies. Coastal areas that embrace the shared water basin that could constitute “a shared realm of memory” are important for this kind of research (Borschberg and North 2010, pp. 279–92).

The initial impetus for this article emerged in late June 2014, when a small international group of students and professors took part in a summer program called “Russian Culture in Baltic Nature” that traveled from Helsinki, Finland to the island Saaremaa in Estonia via St. Petersburg along the coastal zone of the Gulf of Finland.² After the end of the course, both students and professors highlighted that the experience gave them a strong impression of a vast and diverse coastal space, rich with heritage sites created or substantially transformed in the age of the former Russian Empire. The area appeared to be full of fortresses, ports, dams, lighthouses, bridges, manors, and other sites that can be conceptualized as parts of the cultural, but in many cases also the natural, heritage. Noticeably, all these heritage sites, with long and various histories, did not by themselves, without additional reflexive efforts, fit into a common narrative or form any other kind of unity. Rather, they were perceived as elements of quite a patchy picture. The course’s participants noted the divided character of cultural and natural space

¹ <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016802f8a59>.

² See <https://www.facebook.com/Baltic2013/>.

of the Eastern Baltic and noted that the region's borders are very evident and palpable. During the summer program, students met with historians and practitioners who were dealing with remnants of imperial heritage in the three countries along the Baltic. The discussions provided a very clear vision of these heritage sites as separate, being managed within different sovereign political and juridical frameworks, and part of various and sometimes contradictory historical and cultural contexts.

The marine environment provides a distinct "place-meaning, locality and subjectivity" quite important for "contestations about heritage" (Baldacchino 2011, p. 5). Therefore, the heritage of the coastal zones, being important for all the communities living ashore, "has become a selective, re-assembled past, a global domain for political struggles over national and local identities and lifestyle ideologies" (Kristiansen 2015, p. 47). Meanwhile, the coastal heritage by now is predominantly seen as material culture existing "here and now". That is the major focus of the European Maritime Heritage (EMH) non-governmental organization.³ Therefore, the zones of intensive interaction between human society and the water environment deserve special research designed to reveal the long-term trends of the formation and existence of heritage phenomena in a variety of historical and cultural contexts. This seems to be the only way to eventually achieve an understanding of the sustainable and relatively conflict-free management and representation of the heritage in these areas. In this paper, we will look at the heritage of the Gulf of Finland through the perspective of complexity and unity in order to obtain a clear understanding of the links between the environment and one layer of human culture, namely one that is visible through the remnants from the former Russian Empire, recorded and represented in the buildings, ships, infrastructures and museum items.

2. The Gulf of Finland and Heritage of St. Petersburg

The Gulf of Finland is a long (420 km) and narrow (70–130 km) body of water in the easternmost part of the Baltic Sea between Finland, Estonia, and Russia. The Gulf is shallow (39 m on average and 121 at maximum) and sailors have always had to remember that "numerous islands and shoals are scattered about this Gulf, which hitherto have made its navigation extremely hazardous" (Norie 1839, p. 1). The Gulf receives about 120 cubic km of fresh water annually from numerous inflowing rivers with more than 66% provided by the Neva. As a result, the water salinity is very low (not more than 5–8%), although the gulf's concentration of salt increases gradually from east to west. Therefore, marine life in the Gulf has a lot of similarities to that of freshwater basins. This is especially true for the Neva inlet that lies between the mouth of the Neva River mouth and the island of Kotlin—about 20 km long with a maximum width of 15 km shallow bay of 3 m of the average depth.

The landscapes of the coastal zone are varied, including rocky fjords in the north, marshy lowland in the east and wood-covered sand dunes in the south. The Slavs had been settled in the eastern part of the Gulf since the early Middle Ages; however, their use of the Gulf, for instance, for fisheries was quite limited due to a strong focus on freshwater fisheries. The gradual movement of fisheries from upstream to downstream of the rivers was slow, and only in the nineteenth century the fisheries fully developed in the waters of the Gulf (Lajus et al. 2013). For instance, between the 1870s and 1930s, the catches of fish landed in the area of the Neva Bay increased more than catches in the River itself.

Between the thirteenth and the eighteenth centuries, the region witnessed continuous conflict between the Russians and Swedes for control of this area, with a complete dominance of Swedes during the seventeenth century. The foundation of St. Petersburg in the Neva River delta in 1703 and the Russian victory over Sweden became the turning point that marked the beginning of the expansion of the newly born Russian Empire westwards—towards the total control of the Gulf (Kerner 1942, pp. 35–53; North 2015, pp. 145–82).

The vision of the water body as "Our Sea", an inseparable part of the metropolitan area of the Empire, adopted by imperial elite in the eighteenth century, means the cultural conceptualization of this

³ <http://european-maritime-heritage.org>.

part of the waterscape through descriptions and representations adopted by society and constitutes an important part of non-material heritage. First of all, it is connected with the very name given to the area. The case of the Baltic is demonstrative. For the Germans, the name *Ostsee* had clear geographic association as the area connecting the German centers to the territories situated to the East. The history of the Russian perception of this sea is far more complicated. During the centuries that Russian-speaking people have lived on the Baltic shore, they used a variety of names for this water body which reflects the changing concepts of it. The earliest name used in the Russian chronicles was *Varyazhskoe*, the Varangian Sea, which was considered a natural border of the part of the world donated by God to Japheth after the Great Flood. The Varangian Sea of ancient Russian church geographers was much bigger than the modern Baltic Sea; however, historians normally link this name to what we now call the Baltic (Barsov 1885, pp. 12–15; Melnikova 2013, p. 495). The name we use now (*Baltiiskoe*) came to the Russian language in the eighteenth century as a part of cultural Europeanization. Initially the Russians acquired several words from a variety of European languages and used them more or less equally. The German *Ostsee* and Dutch *Ostzee* came to Russia as a result of Russians' foreign travels and as a part of cultural background of foreign experts invited to the Russian service. Later on, when the Russian Empire incorporated territories of the Eastern Baltic during the Great Northern War, this area became the empire's most European part, and St. Petersburg in the center of this region rapidly became the Russian 'space of modernity' (Shaw 2003, pp. 6–29; Knoespel 2003, pp. 17.1–17.14). As a result, the land of the present-day Baltic States that formed special territorial units within the Empire was widely named the *Ostsee provinces*, thus highlighting the particular political and cultural situation in the area as well as a strong connection to the sea. These possessions were considered directly a part of Europe that was incorporated into the Russian Empire but remained rather autonomous (Kappeler 2001, pp. 71–77; Tuhtenhagen 2002, pp. 81–113).

In line with this name, the Russian language acquired the word *Belt*, thus expanding the name of the Danish straight between the Baltic Sea and Kattegat to the entire sea. The word Baltic came to the Russian language apparently as a result of interaction with Latin, which used to play an important role in the transfer of European scientific knowledge (Havu 1994, pp. 71–86). For a long time, Russians used two variants to translate the Latin word *Balticum* (*Baltiiskii* and *Balticheskii*), and eventually the current variant (*Baltiiskii*) came into common usage. Liudmila Zaients, an expert in Russian literature of the eighteenth century, noted that poetically, this sea was often described as *haughty* or *proud*. These words used by Russian poetry reflect the efforts the Russians made in order to familiarize themselves to the newly adopted space and to acquire the new technologies of mastering the region politically, economically, and culturally. Moreover, the Baltic seashore quite paradoxically was represented as a wild and almost forgotten land (despite its long history and ethnic variety of its peoples) that required new birth from the young and growing Russian Empire (Zaients 2005, pp. 118–38).

The interconnections between the imperial capital and the surrounding environment have already received some attention from historians. The Neva River, being the most visible part of the urban space of St. Petersburg, has been described as a part of urban life through different perspectives like transportation, water services, or the threat of flood (Dills 2010; Dills 2014, pp. 479–96; Kraikovski and Lajus 2010, pp. 339–64). The Gulf of Finland and its heritage, however, has received less scholarly attention. It was predominantly considered as a sort of threshold of St. Petersburg's transportation hub (Keller 2010) or a source of fresh fish for the urban markets (Lajus et al. 2013; Kraikovski et al. 2008, pp. 197–216). However, we propose that the Gulf is an inseparable element of the history and life of St. Petersburg as such, and we argue that to a great extent it is to be analyzed from the perspective of a unity it has historically created between the major St. Petersburg river and the easternmost part of the Baltic Sea under the influence of rapidly developed, urbanized metropolitan space of St. Petersburg.

We use *Greater St. Petersburg* as a spatial imaginary to label the particular space of urban social life, which can be described as an area easily and comfortably available for citizens by the means of transportation allowed by technological development contemporary to the time. Indeed, the development of transportation technologies caused the expansion of *Greater St. Petersburg* while

social inequality limited access to the latest technologies, and therefore created differences between *Greater St. Petersburg* of the aristocracy and that of the commoners.

Over two centuries of St. Petersburg's imperial history, the metropolitan center has shaped the adjacent area. If we agree that "landscape conveyed meanings of elite groups, representing dominant need and interests" (Bellentani 2016, p. 78), then the heritage area of St. Petersburg can definitely be considered as a manifestation of the ideas and needs of the imperial center. Elite groups, while managing the city, were also able to project their activities on the outskirts and beyond, including the waterscapes. We argue, however, that the unprivileged social groups, from their side, were involved in the construction of the landscape on the practical level and took part in the development of images and contexts eventually included in the idea of heritage. There are several groups of heritage sites connected to the needs and activities of the imperial capital.

Visual representations of the domination of the new European metropolis archived over the Gulf of Finland are quite informative. For instance, the decorations of Peterhof clearly demonstrate ideas of Russian control over this body of water. This seaside residence manifested the new position of the Russian Emperors as sovereigns of the sea. The sculptures and bas-reliefs of the Grand Cascade represent mythological stories symbolizing the ideas of unfair possession, liberation, and an impossible task. An eighteenth-century observer could read them as a story of the Eastern Baltic that was unfairly owned by the Swedish crown. Then, as a result of the war, the area had been liberated and saved by Russian warriors just as Perseus once saved Andromeda from the dragon (Raskin 1975, pp. 55–56). Thus, the spirit of the young and expansive empire moving rapidly to the top of its might was clearly connected to the Gulf of Finland. The same is true for the growing new city spreading its influence further westwards along the coast of the Gulf, but also on the surface of the water and even to the underwater world through management of the bottom for waterway security and through the exploitation of marine biota. However, the public vision of the interrelations between St. Petersburg and the surrounding nature became much less optimistic in the next century. The city of St. Petersburg began to be described as a dangerous and moody cold place surrounded and oppressed by severe nature. The Gulf, responsible for catastrophic floods, played an important role in this image of a city living under the sword of Damocles.

The transportation of goods and people were the first necessity of the young city, which was founded to be a major port. The transportation infrastructure formed the backbone of the development of *Greater St. Petersburg* along the sea coast but also into the hinterland along the rivers and canals (Jones 2013). Being situated on numerous islands of the Neva delta and popularly known since the eighteenth century as the Venice of the North (Di Salvo 2003, pp. 71–79), St. Petersburg expanded along the waterways and included transportation infrastructure as an inseparable part of the city. With time, some of the arrangements used for transportation services, like piers, canals, and harbors, have attained the status of cultural heritage. The history of the lighthouse network is a good example of this. The importance of lighthouses for the development of navigation in the Gulf is undisputable. However, some of those towers received special attention beyond their utilitarian significance. This is, for instance, the case of Tolbukhin lighthouse, one of the oldest elements of the navigational infrastructure of the area of St. Petersburg, which was erected according to an order by Peter the Great and mentioned by numerous observers as a remarkable landmark on the way to and from St. Petersburg (Foxall 1989, p. 89; Korolenko 1978, p. 353).⁴

The needs of protection necessarily resulted in the development of a fortification infrastructure in the Gulf, including the maritime fortress of Kronstadt and numerous forts on the islands and on the coast. All this military infrastructure is useless for the Navy now, and the problem of the development of the forts as sites of heritage tourism is being actively discussed in St. Petersburg among

⁴ Tolbacken, as J.Q. Addams named it in his memoirs. See: (Adams 1874, pp. 44–45).

the city dwellers and the representatives of the local authorities.⁵ The success of Fort Constantine, an important part of the Kronstadt fortifications that was transformed into a tourist center with a museum of lighthouses, is a good example for the further development of the idea.⁶ Eventually the local authorities intend to include the entire Kronstadt into the general development of the St. Petersburg touristic complex. The media support this intention and represent the history of the Kronstadt forts as an inseparable part of St. Petersburg's imaginary and memory.⁷

Another complex of cultural concepts developed to demonstrate the Europeanness of the new Russian capital through interaction between the city and the Gulf came with the frequent comparisons between St. Petersburg and Venice. Since the eighteenth century, Russian poets have drawn direct links between the Neva and the Gulf on the one hand, and the Brenta and Venetian lagoon on the other, making an important contribution to the metaphor of the Venice of the North mentioned above. Moreover, Vladimir Nabokov in his profound research on Alexander Pushkin's masterpiece *Evgenii Onegin* demonstrated that this literary comparison was widely used in European literature of that time, and therefore the Russians utilized this image following European cultural trends.⁸ Quite noticeably, the widely cited description of St. Petersburg as the window to Europe has also come from Venice. The first mention of this image appeared in the "Letters from Russia" by the Venetian Francesco Algarotti. His description of the Gulf of Finland directly reveals some parallels with the Adriatic he had to draw as a Venetian—the abundance of islands, relatively narrow space, more suitable for galleys than for big battle ships. The Russians there tried to overcome nature itself, he argued, and therefore they had to take expertise from the Venetians for this (Algarotti 2003).

Last, but not least, the habitual seasonal move of the representatives of the elite between their urban palaces in the winter and suburban manors in the summer resulted in the appearance and intensive growth of luxury residential zones, including those that are inseparably connected with the Gulf.⁹ The Peterhof road along the southern coast of the Gulf that in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries passed through numerous luxury manors, including the imperial estates of Strelna, Peterhof, and Oranienbaum, is, perhaps, the most known case of that kind (Lovell 2003, pp. 9–14; Buckler 2005, p. 160).

To sum up, the eighteenth century was a time of intensive transformation of the Gulf both as a socioecological site and as an important part of local culture. That kind of process recently had been described as *enviroining*—a transition from nature to environment, shaped by technologies, which is the process of the demarcation and generation of the environment by human activities (Sörlin and Warde 2009; Sörlin and Wormbs 2018). In our case, technology and infrastructure were the instruments of the physical mastery of the Gulf, while its cultural conceptualization by means of production of images by literature and visual arts was used for the cultural mastery of it.

3. Technological Arrangements and Infrastructure as Tangible Heritage

Control over the waterscape is inseparable from the construction of a variety of infrastructures. First, the harbors of the area became parts of a network of transportation hubs with a clear hierarchy, in which the smaller ports provided important services for the major center. For example, the coast of the Gulf of Finland already had an impressive infrastructure by the early eighteenth century, when the new metropolis emerged in its eastern corner. One could name the medieval ports of Reval, Narva,

⁵ See the report on the meeting organized by the St. Petersburg government on the development of Kronstadt forts, <https://kronvestnik.ru/city/19802> (accessed on 10 February 2019).

⁶ See the official website of the project Fort Constantine, <http://forthotel.ru/> (accessed on 6 February 2018).

⁷ See for instance "Obitaemyi ostrov", TV 5, St. Petersburg, 10.11.2012, <https://www.5-tv.ru/programs/broadcast/507322/> (accessed on 1 February 2018).

⁸ See Vladimir Nabokov's commentary in: (Pushkin 1964, pp. 181–85).

⁹ An account on seasonal changes in relations between St. Petersburg citizens and the Neva River in imperial period was recently published, but the role of Gulf in this annual cycle needs to be researched further, see (Kraikovski and Lajus 2017, pp. 235–54).

and Vyborg that had supported and controlled the commercial activities between Russia and Europe for centuries (Shaskolskii 1994). The difference is, however, the unity of the new infrastructure created by the Russian Empire and its orientation towards one clear goal: the prosperity of St. Petersburg. The authorities considered the Gulf as a space that had to be transformed in order to serve the imperial capital in a variety of ways. Eventually, this transformation led to the decline of other ports in the Gulf, as they had to put up with supporting roles even though the new capital opened up new opportunities for the Baltic merchants (Aristov 2013, pp. 196–223; Kuuskemaa 2009, p. 5). Even when the minor ports' activity had not been in decline, but actually increased, the observers explained this dynamic through the perspective of services this port provided for the Imperial capital rather than through the perspective of competition with the port of St. Petersburg. For instance, the port of Reval (nowadays Tallinn) developed quite dynamically by the 1880s. The contemporaries explained this by the fact that, after the construction of the railroad, Reval became a winter port of St. Petersburg. In other words, Reval's harbor received additional vessels when the ice in the Gulf blocked the possibilities for direct delivery of cargo to the capital (Sovetov 1891, pp. 830–33).

Secondly, the metropolitan bay was to become a fortified zone of protection for the imperial center. As a result, all the areas under study can be described as highly fortified. The heyday of this kind of work normally coincided with the development of the metropolitan center in general. For instance, the 18th and 19th centuries became a time of intensive fortification work on the Gulf of Finland that took place both on the coasts and on the islands. Every single fortification complex has its own history, of course. Kronstadt, the major base of the Russian Baltic navy on the island of Kotlin in the Neva inlet, has been predominantly studied through the perspective of the history of St. Petersburg. The maritime fortress lies to some extent on a sort of border between the Neva and the Sea (Kraikovski and Lajus 2010, pp. 363–64). The fortified naval base of Rogervik (nowadays Paldiski to the West of Tallinn, Estonia), close to the formal border of the Gulf of Finland, has attracted some scholarly attention as an impressive example of a Petrine fortification project considered to be a sort of competitor to Kronstadt, with the latter emerging "as the ultimate victor" in this competition (Duffy 1985, pp. 213–14). The fortress of Sveaborg (Suomenlinna, nowadays in Helsinki, Finland) has a complicated history, being founded as a base for the Swedish royal navy and as a stronghold against Russia. The unique character of this place that 'was built to block the military force invading from the east' and that 'was one of the least cosmopolitan places within the Swedish realm' (Rydén 2016, p. 327), made it, eventually, quite a precious jewel in the Russian crown of the Baltic Sea sovereign. When Finland became part of the Russian Empire in 1809, the Russian navy moved to Sveaborg, providing through this the complete control of the waterways from the West to the Russian capital. As a result, in the nineteenth century, these three fortification complexes formed the basic foundation for a complicated network of sophisticated and technologically advanced naval infrastructure that included forts, batteries, storages, piers, navigational services, radio stations, etc. All these compounds eventually made the Gulf of Finland one of the most protected waterscapes in the world, and the imperial capital was the driving force behind these arrangements (Schatzcki 2003, pp. 82–93).

The development of residential infrastructure is the last, but no less important, part of technological control over the adjacent waterscapes. The case of the Peterhof road, the narrow and long area of noble estates on the southern coast of the Gulf of Finland, is the best example of that kind in the Eastern Baltic area. The role of the Gulf in the development of this part of St. Petersburg's suburbs is crucial (Lovell 2003, pp. 9–13). However, what really unified the city and the Gulf was water transportation. It was critically important for St. Petersburg from the very beginning (Plath 2015). The detailed history of water routes inside the city is well described (Kraikovski and Lajus 2010, pp. 356–57). The same is true for the history of canals that connected the imperial capital to central Russia and which served as a transportation network of vital necessity before and even after the construction of railroads (Jones 2013). Two things, however, are to be discussed here concerning the importance of transportation technologies for the formation of *Greater St. Petersburg*. First, those technologies have made this space socially determined. The *Greater St. Petersburg* of the rich people

who had access to the advanced technologies was much larger than that of the poor population. Secondly, it is possible to draw a parallel between the importance of water communications in the Netherlands, described by J. de Vries (De Vries 1981), and the situation in early modern St. Petersburg, where water transportation became the earliest kind of public transport in the modern sense of this word, i.e., a regular, affordable and routine part of urban everyday life. For instance, in the 1830s count Alexander Benckendorff, the owner of the castle Schloss Fall (now Keila Joa in Estonia), situated some 400 km to the West from St. Petersburg on the Gulf shore, could reach his manor very easily with the steamboat provided by the Emperor. Therefore, this manor can undoubtedly be considered as a part of his *Greater St. Petersburg* (Kraikovski and Shukurova 2017, pp. 139–59).

The infrastructure constructed and managed for St. Petersburg—from the naval bases and luxury palaces to the light towers and commercial piers—made the Gulf of Finland an inseparable part of the imperial capital itself, the ‘inner Sea’ of St. Petersburg. The enormous network of transportation lines from big ships to the small boats connected all the elements of this infrastructure to form an impressive network. However, *Greater St. Petersburg* meant much more than just infrastructure building. The environment itself was to be transformed in order to make the Gulf of Finland a real metropolitan bay in accordance with the vision of imperial authorities.

The waterscapes managed by the metropolitan centers as their metropolitan bays were inevitably significantly transformed from an environmental point of view. The transformation of the waterscapes in early modern time included coastal protection, transformation of sea bottom for organizing waterways, development of port and fishing stations and other activities. Coastal protection is an important part of the fortification and residential infrastructure described above. However, projects of flood protection that had to prevent this iconic St. Petersburg disaster merit a separate discussion. The history of these technological systems was studied more than once, of course (Zotov 2006, pp. 373–80). However, we argue that the importance of flood protection for the natural and cultural heritage of the Gulf is still significantly understudied. The dam across the Bay of the Neva, constructed between 1979 and 2011, became the dominant part of the waterscape. As a result, the visual appearance of the fortification objects inside the protected area is now radically changed.

Fisheries provided an important part of the heritage of St. Petersburg metropolitan bay. The history of the exploitation of the fish population of the Eastern Baltic is much older than St. Petersburg. However, the growing city created an attractive market, and the local fishermen tried to do their best to receive a part of the profits. The network of fishing stations in the lower Neva shaped the city view from the sea and made a significant contribution into the daily life of city-dwellers (Kraikovski and Lajus 2008, pp. 217–27; Lajus et al. 2013). Robert Bremner, the author of a guidebook for English tourists published in 1839, noted that fishing boats in the summer became an important and very visible part of the waterscape both on the Neva and on the Gulf. Moreover, he recommended the observation of the infrastructure related to the fish trade as an important part of any visit to the city (Bremner 1839, pp. 182–84). Most of this infrastructure is completely lost now, but numerous amateur fishermen are still a visible part of the cityscape. However, in terms of heritage, we predominantly deal with intangible phenomena like images and descriptions, but not with physical objects. The case of the Gorstkin market is very demonstrative. Indeed, this building on the bank of the Fontanka River (a tributary of the Neva River) was an important center of the fish trade in late imperial St. Petersburg. However, no decorations, memorial objects or other visible signs of the importance of this place for the history of local fisheries can be observed now. The material heritage of fisheries seems to be out of special interest for the citizens thus far. However, the annual appearance of smelt and the spring revival of fisheries on the Neva is definitely an important part of the annual cycle of cultural life in the city and the regional media provide some attention to it.¹⁰

¹⁰ See for instance a quite emotional report of a local TV company published in April 2014—<http://www.5-tv.ru/news/83526/>.

4. Conclusions

The vision of *Greater St. Petersburg* as a complex area united by natural and cultural heritage seems to be a good instrument with which to include the northern capital of Russia in important international contexts. The idea of a comparison between St. Petersburg and Venice is not new, as was mentioned above. However, the similarity between these two water metropolises is predominantly discussed through the perspective of numerous islands, bridges, and canals. We argue that a comparative vision of St. Petersburg and Venice is relevant for the study of both urban centers as core elements of vast zones including the seascapes. The unity and complexity of heritage related to the mastering of the adjacent parts of the marine environment is the foundation for this general view. Indeed, the Adriatic Sea, which was managed and controlled by *La Serenissima* at the heyday of the maritime empire of Venice, is split by state borders as well and the heritage sites related to it are included into various national contexts. Moving the center of focus from the terrestrial-built environment to the maritime ones provides more holistic research perspective, making the complex vision possible.

Therefore, we may conclude that the concept of *maritimity* in imperial heritage is crucial for understanding of natural and cultural heritage of both areas. We can only agree with Charlotte Andrews that “maritimity offers a less obvious, less conscious type of heritage than heritage researchers and practitioners usually gravitate to, one relatively untouched by popular, authorized, or commoditized influences. It allows the researcher to glean heritage meaning more obliquely and disrupts the more established disciplinary perceptions of heritage—including dichotomies of natural–cultural, tangible–intangible, landscape–seascape” (Andrews 2009). The use of this concept opens new avenues in the study of coastal areas—with the Gulf of Finland among the most promising areas for future research.

It is constantly stated that research in maritime history has to cope with conflicting and entangled memories. Physical and topographic nature of the waterscapes persisted through centuries (in spite of significant environmental changes), although “functions, role and status have changed significantly over time and according to a specific cultural context” (North 2018). Nowadays institutions and individual experts from different countries even across the major borders could be united in their efforts towards common environmental goals. For instance, in recent years the vision of the Gulf of Finland as “*Our Common Gulf*” was implemented in a joint ecological initiative known as *Gulf of Finland Year 2014*, a joint project of Estonian, Russian, and Finnish experts with large political and public outreach components. During this initiative, “experts produced information on the status of the Gulf of Finland and found measures to achieve a good status of the marine ecosystem”.¹¹ Over one hundred events have been organized throughout the year in the coastal cities of the Gulf of Finland. And, although, some joint efforts in cultural politics are implemented within the framework of cross-border cooperation between the European Union and Russia on the Baltic (Nilsson et al. 2010, pp. 165–66), more attention to a nuanced conceptualization and management of maritime heritage of the imperial past of the Gulf of Finland is still needed.

Author Contributions: A.K. provided empirical data for the paper, prepared the original draft of a manuscript. J.L. provided theoretical framework and took part in the review and editing of the final manuscript.

Funding: The research leading to these results has received funding from the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics in 2018. The APC was funded through the Knowledge Unlatched initiative.

Acknowledgments: The authors are very grateful to Julia Leikin for careful reading of the text and valuable suggestions on its improvement.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

¹¹ www.syke.fi/projects/gulfoffinlandyear2014 (accessed on 17 February 2019).

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