

Cities on Water

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Abstract

The spring 2014 inaugural McKinley Futures Studio at the University of Washington generated three research-based, speculative design scenarios that envision urban futures based on highly novel, hybrid sea-borne platforms. These unique projects serve as a framework for closer examination of the great problems facing succeeding generations—society, health, environment, government, economy, science, and technology— areas of human activity on which future global equity and prosperity depend.

The three projects included in this presentation offer alternative scenarios for future offshore urban development. Each in its own way adapts technologies already employed in the design, engineering, and operation of both vernacular and highly engineered maritime infrastructures, but they also imagine entirely new and untested solutions based on technology transfer, natural formations, and pure invention. Although traditional communities have long been living on water—Seattle houseboats are just one example—there are few clear precedents or typologies at the scale of cities. With that said, recent continuing sea level rise is no fantasy, and architectural speculation has intensified accordingly. The past decade has witnessed accelerated design and planning around the impact of rising sea levels on coastal cities that are already under pressure from global urbanization and extreme weather events. This studio extended that inquiry beyond the waterfront out onto the water itself.

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