AIVP Days - Congress Report

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The theme of congress, port-city animation, invited from the beginning to have a holistic approach, considering different perspectives, from academia to practitioners, from municipalities to Port Authorities.

The same week before the congress, we had the opportunity to discuss the most innovative practices in terms of social interaction between ports and citizens, during the 4th meeting of the port center Network. This tool, empowered by the AIVP, has evolved from simple explanation centers, with the typical port model and ancient images, to interactive platforms where the local residents can actually play a more active role in the port clusters and planning. We saw innovative examples from private companies, such as Contship, education and cultural institutions, like the STP from Rotterdam. Also Port Authorities participated, such as Livorno and Marseille, explaining the development process of a Port Center in the different scales and strategies. Urban agglomerations, like Lorient, proposes first to establish a local network and only after to consider a physical location and the associated investment. All these approaches contribute to enhance and clarify the role of the port in society, explain their importance and give disclosure to aspects that often remain hidden, only seeing the light for the most negative reasons. The local inhabitants, either port neighbors or city residents, sooner or later will become involved in the port development process, being either participants in the externalities, or, worse case scenario, players in NIMBY phenomenon. It has been proved that it is better to prevent than to fight, to avoid the conflict, to bring them inside the planning process, and find common strategies. It is important that the peopled feel as part of the solution, not of the problem.

During the congress we were able to see the combination of different strategies, from more traditional perspectives, to others more innovative. The keynote presentation, by landscape architects Michel Desvigne and Inessa Hansch, introduced their project for Le Havre's waterfront, that tries to establish a new contact with from the street to the port. One of the key features of their design is flexibility. It is achieved by creating a new simple public space where temporary facilities and events can be made. In their presentation they introduced an important concept, that of port beauty, and how challenging it is to share it. The following round table brought representative from different European cases, with different backgrounds. We could see initiatives from Genoa – Porto Antico, Rotterdam STP, and Dublin Port Authority (DPA). One relevant detail is the fact that, with the exception of Dublin, the other organizations were not the usual players in the port-city animation, showing the different paths that can be taken to increase citizens presence on the waterfront and provide them a more complete image of the port.

Mr. O'Reilly, from DPA, highlighted a relevant point, that two realities were being discussed. On the one hand, the animation of regenerated waterfront locations that historically hosted port activities, e.g Genoa Port Antico. On the other the challenge of developing a sustainable social relationship with the

active port, such as what happens in Marseille Bassin Est, Lisbon or in Dublin itself. The core issue is the possible combination of both strategies.

In academia the descriptive geographic model developed by Bird, Hoyle and others, describes the separation process and port exodus from central historical waterfront location. Although this model has been broadly accepted, it can also be discussed. Waterfront regeneration projects, as the ones presented by the keynote speakers of Le Havre, the one from Las Palmas, or Quebec, still do take place. However, as more restrictive environmental legislation and ecological public conscience is developed, blue and green field port development will probably find stronger opposition and limitation. As said in other publications, port retrofitting is an alternative to consider. This strategy raises the problem of peaceful coexistence and the acceptance of certain port landscapes within urban tissues. Further on, the ISPS code presents additional challenges regarding the port-city-citizen interaction. However, the code has existed since 2001, giving enough time for creative solutions to be developed, as it was indicated by Mr. Renaud Paubelle, from the GPM of Marseille, mentioning the Terrasses du Port project in the same city.

Port retrofitting can be seen in some cases aforementioned. Although challenging , it might be the most sustainable alternative when we consider the global scale. The fact of being "under surveillance" of the public eye forces companies and institutions to innovate taking advantage of new technologies that are already available. During the conference, examples of this technology were discussed, such as the ships that are able to produce more energy than the one they consume, the electrified docks, providing power to the ships avoiding fossil fuels, or the use of LNG on cruise ships. These advances require initial investment to later produce economical benefits. In cities is where port companies will feel the pressure to implement these innovations, that later will also benefit them.

In order to achieve what is commonly known as the (Social) License to Operate (LTO), ports have to use all available resources. The simple hard figures expressing the economic impact in terms of employment or turnaround traffic are not enough. As Mr. O'Reilly mentioned, Soft Values (Van Hooydonk, 2007) have to be explored. The associated cultural and social elements, explained by Hein, that ports used to produce as unplanned externalities provide an opportunity to explain the port and other positive, often intangible, values, such as port-city identity. This concept, studied mainly in the academic world, is key for a sustainable port-city relationship. If Lynch (1960) once was able to define the image of the city and how people absorb information in the urban environment, our challenge is the definition of the image of the port-city, a task to which all stakeholders can and must contribute. In this sense social sciences are one of the key paths, as pointed out by Hein, where innovations can be made, also to inspire and set the course for institutional change and later concrete actions in each port-city.

If we use Soft-Values, we have to consider unquantifiable elements such as "port beauty" as mentioned by the keynote speaker, Mr. Michel Desvigne. Although "beauty" can be considered a subjective element, it is undeniable that even modern ports are able to have a certain fascination beyond logistic or economic values. This is a key element, combined with extensive socio-economical projects that involve the community and spread out through the entire port-city, including all kinds of actors, from private companies to educational college such as what we saw in Barcelona´s maritime cluster or Rotterdam STP.

To conclude, two remarks. The first one refers to the composition of the audience. The presence of delegates from very different geographical regions highlights one particular characteristic of the port-

maritime world. Although it is one of the pillars of globalizations, with private actors and organizations often operating in a continental or global scale, each context has its own idiosyncrasies. It is not possible to copy-paste solutions seen during the conference. The goal of these meetings and of the AIVP is the exchange of experiences that can inspire to animate each port-city adapting global strategies to the local context and available resources.

The second remark refers to the return of investment, probably one of the main challenges port-city animation faces. It is not easy to explain and convince certain sector and political leaders to make the investment into port-city animation. Sociological, management and other academic studies could be used to explain the issue and gather the necessary support. However, if we consider the alternative, not doing anything, as it happened during most part of the 20th century, we should find some justification for the investment. If we observe the consequences of this long lasting inaction in the social port-city relationship during decades, the opposition that has gradually emerged, the lack of awareness we can find a strong enough motivation to invest and take action. As Eamonn O´Rielly said regarding social initiatives, and by extension port-city animation: "we do it because we have to".

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