



**Last week port authorities and city developers from across the world met in Le Havre, celebrating the 500-year anniversary of this beautiful port-city. The blue hazy air that Monet was able to catch on his famous impressionist painting of the rising sun over the port. After spending a few days here I realise the locals are right: there is something with the air in the city. Port citizens don't need words to understand what's so special, they just know.**

These days Le Havre is a place where world citizens tell each other stories of their lives in vibrant port-cities across the world. This year's theme of the International Association of Port-Cities (AIVP) is how port promotion and animation, such as open door days, port festivals and port centers contribute to a better competitive position of the port. Such activities create an open dialogue between stakeholders which is expected to produce positive outcomes in terms of the way citizens take on board port development projects. Why would ports want to engage with communities? And if doing so, what is the return of investment of this community engagement?

During the two-day programme, several chief executives, port directors, city mayors and developers, but also landscape and city architects shared their stories: Le Havre, Dublin, Genova, Rotterdam, Marseille, Barcelona, La Rochelle, Quebec, Las Palmas, Valparaiso, Venice, Brest. What surprised me was the use of colours in their port animation projects, the emphasis on art and artistic design, the way that citizens are giving new life to port heritage. Many ports also provided illustrations how ports have evolved over the years, decades, and centuries. All had a number of characteristics in common: the strong connection between the ports and its citizens. Together they survived economic depressions, wars, floods, even earthquakes. No wonder that citizens want to celebrate the symbiosis of their lives with their ports. In recent years, many ports feel the need to open up the port to the citizens after having been divided by two industrial revolutions. They enter into a new era of coexistence, despite security and safety issues. Communities are considered vital for the so-called license to operate. Without the consent of the public, ports are hampered in their growth, blamed for congestion and pollution and set aside as being an unattractive place to work. In this new phase of coexistence business, citizens and authorities take upon a shared responsibility towards challenges, issues and risks through connected citizen programmes.

There are multiple reasons why ports should be bothered to get communities involved. Ports around the world are increasingly seeking to limit negative externalities (in particular reducing the ecological burden of operations) and enhance positive externalities (optimize the social and economic effects of their operations). Governments around the world are embracing so-called inclusive growth policies. The International Maritime Organisation has embraced the sustainable development goals, whilst national port masterplans are increasingly aiming to not only make an economic impact but also raise social and environmental standards. Ports can contribute to the sustainable development goals by focussing on inclusive ambitions, particularly to provide accessibility through transport and connectivity, with a priority on people's quality of life, safety and social equity".

When it comes to quantifying the ROI, this assumes there are only economic returns. In the context of port-city I think the word 'crossovers' is a better word, because there are mutual benefits for

## Competing through Port-City Animation - Synthesis by Maurice Jansen

both. When talking about a return on investment, one has to wonder who is investing in what and what resources are available to make an investment. I came to realise that there needs to be other sources of capital available than just economic: human capital, cultural capital and social capital. These are the hidden treasures that make ports thrive. The assumption I have is that such capital can only be unlocked if institutions are in place (such as schools, museums, port centres, annual celebrations such as maritime days or heritage events) and that there are mechanisms in place that support the exchange of these sources of capital that in the end unlock value that otherwise would have been locked inside individual organisations. Examples here are the World Port Days, but also innovation accelerator programs such as PortXL or Hackathons. What is the link with competition? In the end, organisations who consider how they are competing in today's marketplace always decide for themselves: am I fighting this battle alone, do I pick my battles and outsource it, or do I engage the crowd.

What are the costs of getting involved in the community is actually difficult to say. Port companies are not good in marketing their activities to the public, they focus mostly on business to business, not business to consumer communication. How do you quantify those costs then? In a direct sense, all costs for public affairs, corporate social responsibility programs should be factored in, but the more you engage with the community, the more people from within the port authority organisations will have a more direct relationship with the community and therefore spend more of their time on community building. But it is not about costs.

For this to understand let's flip the question: why would the community be bothered to assist the port with solving their issues? The fundamental condition for others to join in is that contributors will have to believe in the 'do good' mission of the community. The 'what's in it for me' has changed into 'what's in it for us'. It builds on the premise that the intentions of the community appeal to the needs of the crowd, quite often linked to societal goals, and therefore get free support from the public. The illustrations given by the speakers at the AIVP Days made it very clear that connected citizen programmes is the way forward.

This brings me back to my initial point. Ports are more and more embracing partnerships and collaborate to solve tensions. They strive to contribute to sustainable goals for development and consider themselves more than just a node in the transport network. Their societal goal is to provide accessibility through transport and connectivity, with a priority on people's quality of life, safety and social equity. If you put it like this, connecting with the crowd makes perfectly sense. And what better way is there than to use artists to capture the stories: ask a painter to capture the colours of the sky, ask a poet to find the right words and a musician to live up the day with a symphony. A port-city's beauty is priceless, it touches the heart.

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