

CALL FOR PAPERS

WHAT ROLE IS THERE FOR SMALLER PORTS IN TOMORROW'S MARITIME SYSTEM?

Whereas port research places great emphasis on large ports, small or medium-sized ports (territorial ports) should not be ignored.

Major ports have established themselves as a fundamental element in maritime shipping, participating actively in the general movement towards the globalization of the economy. Maritime shipping effectively is a physical pillar in our globalized economy as it interconnects the continents. An incident concerning maritime shipping taking place on the other side of the world can obstruct maritime traffic and disrupt whole sectors of the economy. Maritime shipping is subject to several developments, necessitating important changes such as the trend towards giant container ships, which in part condition the strategies of the different port stakeholders. Likewise, the question of the energy transition or that of digitalization are of particular sensitivity today. The new trend towards relocating means of production to consumer countries questions the structural organization of internationalized sectors and the transport flows of goods.

As a consequence, the largest maritime ports, with very large tonnages, lie at the heart of research questions. According to UNCTAD, the volume transported by sea could almost double over a few decades. Medium-sized ports and/or those with lower volumes of traffic will have a role to play in accommodating this increased traffic and must therefore be included in these research questions. France is similar to many other foreign countries in that its coasts possess a string of small and medium-sized ports which play an important role in cabotage and service provision to the territories. **These smaller**, mostly decentralized, **ports**, and/or managed more locally, **constitute a resource pool of activity and employment for the local area**. They open up possibilities for other transit networks and the implementation of logistics with lower carbon emissions. Shorter routes or more energy-efficient supports being less "massive" can therefore be envisaged. In this they can be potential drivers of innovation.

In consequence, all ports could possibly be concerned by the research, whatever their size. In the "large" ports as in the "small" ones, the question concerns the duplication of these organizations in both local and globalized systems at the same time. There is also the consideration that some of these smaller ports represent prime subjects of investigation. Access to them is simpler, and their governance structure can make observation, analysis or even experimentation easier. With a view to the ecological transition, they make it possible, for example, to reflect on the concentration of activities as against their dispersion, between economies of scale on the one hand and the greater proximity and short channels on the other. Moreover **this approach through territorial ports constitutes a considerable advantage. Not only does it offer possibilities of analysis in many sea basins, but also opens up the perspective of comparative approaches**, according to multiple possible geographical combinations.

The position of these small and medium-sized ports must therefore form an **integral part of scientific debate**, as they participate fully in national port systems with issues that are often specific ones, linked to the uniqueness of their traffic. The density of the network of ports, in

effect, is often considered as an undeniable advantage for the territory in question. The governance of this type of collection, rich in its diversity, here again calls for different angles of approach.

In France, for example, there are over 500 decentralized ports. They are mainly marinas, but also, in the case of some of them, they are important fishing or trading ports. Besides this, a study conducted on a sample of 16 decentralized port establishments, from Calais to Ajaccio by way of Dieppe, Brest, Toulon and Nice, shows that the sample chosen handles around 20% of the total traffic of French ports, directly employs 11 000 people and, when adding indirect employees, employment in these ports amount to 27 000 salaried personnel.

Successive acts of decentralization towards towns, departments and regions now mean there is a need to take an interest in the competences of each of these territorial entities as well as their modes of action. This examination is even richer and deeper when it concerns overseas ports, which play a central roles in insular spaces.

What characterizes small ports, therefore, is their diversity and thus complicating questions. The diversity that characterizes small ports therefore adding complexity to the question.

Indeed, the first line of research addressed at the symposium will focus on the **definition of small ports** (small or medium-sized ports). Despite there being a wide range of means available for their definition, principally based on quantitative criteria (physical manifestation of certain infrastructures, tonnage, extent of infrastructures, etc.), the diversity of situations leads to the need for deeper reflection. Within the EU's statistical taxonomy, the port authorities managing an annual volume of goods below 10 million tonnes are called small ports, and the port authorities managing annually between 10 and 50 million tonnes of goods are medium-sized ports. It is questionable, however, whether this threshold, taken up by the ESPO (European Sea Ports Organisation) according to which small ports handle cargoes no larger than 10 million tonnes per year, is really relevant.

The question of the size of a port is always dependent on its coastal location, its openness not only to the ocean but also to the hinterland, but also to the economic and political context: regional differentiation influences the very relative question of the size of a port and consequently the classification of large, medium-sized and small ports. What could be called small in the Mediterranean space, for example, can be qualified as medium-sized in the Baltic region and small ports can be of great regional importance.

Moreover, small ports only rarely provide a significant contribution to international maritime trade and sometimes find themselves in an awkward position. They have neither the traffic base nor the means to modify their rank, in terms of physical infrastructures.

They are therefore often qualified as secondary or intermediary, and anchored on niche traffic. Yet are they necessarily **purely the reflection of ports of great importance or do they differ in some aspects from the large terminals?** What place can they occupy in the globalized and massified maritime networks? Can they succeed in the development of an important strategy of diversification in their clientele and types of flows so as to attenuate the impact of fluctuations in world trade?

As mentioned above, the increased potential in traffic flows, passengers and goods, was seen for a long time as an element of progress, enabling ever more interactions and participating in

the development of a globalized economy. Yet some of these practices are energy intensive and pose problems of sustainability of the resource or of pollution. Shipping is particularly concerned, in fact: for ship propulsion, every year 200 million tonnes of heavy fuel oil are necessary, i.e. 45% of world consumption. Maritime shipping is responsible for almost 3% of greenhouse gas emissions. Reduced to the loaded tonne, maritime shipping is the least polluting mode of transportation, but decarbonizing this sector is a major challenge. It is therefore worth considering the **potential role of small ports in the decarbonization of maritime shipping**: density of the network, possibility of a modal shift towards cabotage appear to constitute opportunities. However, in small ports worldwide, the complexity of the legislation and development in stakeholder expectations make ensuring compliance with the environmental or safety legislation, with which these ports are confronted, more and more difficult. This institutional complexity increases the areas of uncertainty and seriously endangers this type of port.

Connected also to potential challenges in the years to come, there is the question of the **impact of global warming on industrial-port activities**, which has not yet been sufficiently studied. One of the first notable consequences will be the exposure of maritime ports to rising sea levels. How can ports foresee the risks? What are the resources at the disposal of small ports in the matter?

Ports, including small or medium-sized ports, **regularly rethink their strategies to support the transformation of the industrial activities implanted** in the port domain. Some of them are strongly linked to the transformation and exploitation of fossil raw materials and seek to compensate for the fall in conventional traffic of solid and liquid bulk cargo by developing alternative traffic and new activities. This translates into commissioning new ones (i.e. ro-ro, container, heavy lift, cruise) but also through the **development of activities** linked to the **ecological transition**: marine energies, waste recycling, **industrial ecology, circular economy**, production and distribution of hydrogen, dockside electrical connections, ship repair, etc. Do these issues have a differentiated impact on large ports and smaller ports? Do these alternative activities and traffic constitute real and sustainable drivers of growth? Are they able to generate as much added value as that from carbonaceous traffic? What mechanisms need to be implemented to speed up the ecological transition of ports and give them greater appeal for decarbonized industrial/logistical activities? What is the impact on the economic model of ports? These are the many questions likely to be developed during the symposium.

When discussing small or medium-sized ports, it is also important **to address the maritime and territorial dimension of this collection simultaneously** (often the latter is given less noteworthiness in the scientific or economic field). The ports in question are potentially highly instructive in the field of territorial development and regional sciences in general. Indeed, the territorialization of this sector of activity is part of a general movement of decentralization. It forces local actors to operate apprenticeships so as to capture sometimes newly developed skills to their fullest extent. Beyond the port dimension, this phase of territorialization enables governance processes to be updated and they can have an impact on local development (over and above the maritime sector). It makes it possible to identify the “skills” level of actors in

complex areas, requiring heavy investments, institutional skills in areas of regeneration: “the active decentralization of ports – thus a dual recomposition: that of territorial institutional scales, of course, but also that of port functions. These multiple functions are costly and often contradictory, calling for choices and arbitrations. To put it directly, in that it alone constitutes a territory in the town, decentralizing a port might impose functional modifications which are far more dramatic than those that can be observed in the decentralization of other types of technical tools of transport (a road, canal, or even an airport).” (Debie, Lavaud-Letilleul., 2009, p. 518)

Maritime ports are areas of economic and industrial activities which can generate economic spinoffs in their port space and beyond. However, is the presence of a territorial port synonymous with the creation of added value for all the economic stakeholders of the territory in which the port is located? Can the presence of a small port lead to the creation of employment in the local labour pool? What is **the socio-economic impact of these secondary ports on their territory** and more generally on territories? Small ports are essential elements of local economies that depend heavily on fishing and tourism. Does the multiplicity of activities, trade, fishing and recreation make them distinctive port ecosystems?

Is there a **complementarity**, or indeed cooperation, **between small and large ports**, or on the contrary, do we find ourselves in a system of **coopetition** or just of **competition**?

One must not deny the role of large ports, therefore, and exclude them from our reflection. Quite the reverse, the previous approach questions **the effects of scale in maritime and port research**. The scale here being both the transcription of a space on a map but also a level of awareness of a phenomenon. The other issue is the question of service to the hinterland, especially connection of the different networks and modes of transport.

The DEVPORT symposium will give preference furthermore to the cross-references of perspectives, according a particular place to papers focusing on situations that are different to those observed in France.

Lastly, the symposium is **interdisciplinary** (geography, history, planning, town planning, economy, logistics, computer science, management sciences, etc.). During the symposium, comparisons will also be made between the different disciplinary and methodological approaches.

Proposals for papers (in French or English) must be submitted before 1st April 2023 on the conference site, respecting the following instructions:

- abstract of one page A4 maximum, Times New Roman 12 points,
- title, author(s), function(s), affiliation(s),
- keywords (maximum five).

The papers can be submitted to a journal (the prospective journals are *Géotransports*, *M@ppemonde*, *Cahiers Scientifiques du transport*) as part of a special issue.