

**European Co-operation**  
**in the Field of Scientific and**  

---

**Technical Research**

**COST 340/44**

COST

30 / 01 / 2003

Secretariat

John Barzman



## **Management Committee**

### **COST 340**

#### **Towards a European Intermodal Transport Network, Lessons from History**

**Subject:** Transport networks and European ports in history - Call for papers for the COST 340 2nd Conference, Milano, June 19-21, 2003

# **Transport networks and European ports in history**

**Call for papers for the COST 340**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Conference**

**Milano, June 19-21, 2003**

**Deadline:** March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2003

**Abstracts should be sent to:** [john.barzman@wanadoo.fr](mailto:john.barzman@wanadoo.fr)  
or [john.barzman@univ-lehavre.fr](mailto:john.barzman@univ-lehavre.fr)  
and / or to: [claudio.pavese@unimi.it](mailto:claudio.pavese@unimi.it)

## **Committee:**

John Barzman, Professeur d'histoire contemporaine, CIRTAI (Centre de recherche sur les transports et les affaires internationales, UMR Idées 6063 CNRS), Université du Havre, UFR LSH « Cultures, espaces, sociétés » - 25, rue Philippe-Lebon 76086 Le Havre cedex - FRANCE

Claudio Pavese, Professor, Università degli Studi di Milano, Facoltà di scienze Politiche, Dipartimento di Storia della Società e delle Istituzioni - Via Livorno, 1, 122 Milano - ITALY (*local organisation*)

Eric Buyst, Professor, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Centre for Economic Studies - Naamsestraat 69, 3000 Leuven - BELGIUM

Michèle Merger, Chargée de recherche, CNRS, Institut d'histoire moderne et contemporaine - 45, rue d'Ulm, 75005 Paris - FRANCE

European ports have been and remain essential links between various modes of transport. With respect to passenger transport, although airlines have captured a big share of the once important long-distance traffic, ports still serve ferry boat and cruise ship travellers. With respect to freight, maritime transport has expanded enormously in the past fifty years. Goods arriving or leaving by sea routes begin or continue their journey on other modes of transport (inland waterways, roads, rail and short sea shipping routes). Sometimes they are handled, stored, repacked, bought and sold before being transhipped. Their nature, volume and fluctuations depend on long-distance supply and demand (that is, on trends in the hinterland and foreland), on the quality of local facilities and know-how, as well as on political decisions.

This activity as a complex connection system between various modes of transport is as old as ports themselves. Many of the problems encountered, solutions tested and outcomes noted in ports in the past, are similar to today's and to those of inland transport hubs. The study of the past development of ports, its causes and consequences, therefore contains important lessons for transport planners today. This is true, not only for the most recent period, but since the rise of large-scale international trade.

The purpose of the Milano conference of the COST-340 project is to confront the view of ports, on the one hand, as segments of vast unimodal networks, and on the other hand, as cohesive connection systems between several modes. We hope to bring together examinations of how operators in a single mode of transport (whether maritime, inland waterways, road or rail) viewed sea ports as a point of their activity, and how those who had a stake in the configuration and future of specific ports prepared for the arrival of these unimodal networks and their junction with other modes in and around the harbour.

Case studies and comparative contributions are therefore solicited in three areas:

## **1. TRANSPORT CONNECTIONS FROM THE STANDPOINT OF PORTS**

One starting point is to attempt to distinguish the various functions of ports. Not all ports were transport hubs: some were primarily dedicated to other activities such as fishing, the military, refuelling or sheltering ships, recreation, and serving as the destination or point of departure or of call of cruises.

Transport connection ports served passenger and freight traffic. Passengers were carried in and out of ports by cars, buses, trains and airplanes. Freight arrived and left by horse-drawn carts, barges, automotive trucks and rail cars, in liquid or granular form, as packages or as live animals, in barrels, bags, boxes or loose heaps of material, and more recently in containers.

The flow of passengers and freight could fluctuate widely over short periods (seasonal, year-to-year) as well as over the very long term (a half-century). It is possible to identify cycles of development or life cycles of ports, causing their rise and decline as transport hubs, as well as economic and urban centres. Ports which have "died" are the subject of Gordon Jackson's "The history and archaeology of ports".

These cycles could be the result of the conflicting interest and decisions of states, shipping companies, goods producers, merchants and harbour and municipal authorities.

Seeking to survive as transportation hubs in the face of this uncertainty, ports sought to develop their infrastructure connections (road, inland navigation, ferry and short sea) as well as their commercial relations and legal position (as determined by such rules as tariff policy, the existence of monopolies, health and safety regulations, colonial links).

## **2. PORTS FROM THE STANDPOINT OF UNIMODAL TRANSPORT NETWORKS**

Transport operators in a particular mode chose: 1) whether to include a sea link in their journey, 2) if so, through which of several available ports, and 3) how extensively to assume responsibility and build facilities for transshipment from their mode to the other modes of transport present in the harbour. The decision of a shipping company to establish an agency, of a railroad company to lay tracks, or of a coalition of economic interests to build a road or to dig a canal, could make or break the future of a particular port.

Some ports were entirely dependent on the passage of a limited range of goods brought by a single transport company (or small group of operators) from a specific area to the shore, to be shipped overseas. Examples include the export of coal and minerals, of forestry, agricultural and plantation goods, in some cases of manufactured products. The producers and overland transport operators could threaten to move to another outlet on the sea if local conditions (taxes, labour cost, public facilities) were not favourable. Ports sought to pin these operators down by obtaining large investments in unmoveable facilities.

On the other hand, large and diversified ports did not depend as closely on the goodwill of transport operators. The relatively stable existence of many transport connections, facilities and skills acted strongly to convince unimodal operators to make such ports a terminal or junction point of their network. "Freight attracts freight".

Political pressures influenced the decision of unimodal operators. Landlocked states could decide to build roads, canals and railways to the only coastal point under their authority, or to avoid passing through the territory of a potential enemy or rival. One thinks of the conflicts over Danzig, Trieste, and of the competition between Rotterdam and Antwerp, and more generally between the northern range ports from Le Havre to Hamburg or even to Göteborg.

Some ports were supported by the state as the best link to nearby islands, provinces or overseas colonies. The regulation of freight tariffs, tolls and customs schedules, the construction of bridges and tunnels, favoured one mode and one port over another. Concessions to electoral, regional or family relations also played a role.

## **3. THE TRANSPORT ACTIVITIES LOCATED IN PORTS**

### **3.1. Complexity**

Once in the harbour area, passengers and freight had to transfer from one mode of transport to another. The transition could be simple and brief or complex and prolonged. Many intermediaries intervened in the process, sometimes developing a stake in the very complexity of the operations they performed. They included various kinds of porters, taxi drivers, hotel and restaurant owners, bus companies, guides, customs agents, sanitary and safety controllers, forwarding agents, brokers, maintenance and repair companies and

their workers, insurance and classification agents, arbiters, specialised lawyers and judges, pilots, mooring linemen, port transport and warehousing companies, truckers and *dockers*, crane operators, and the port authority.

### **3.2. Environment**

The circulation of ships and large land vehicles, the necessary storage and parking areas, the products used for maintenance and repair, the toxicity or hazardous nature of the products transported, had a major environmental impact on the local population, on the air, water and landscape. The exact nature of this impact, the ways in which it was perceived, the gradual rise of the issues of health, safety and environmental protection deserve to be studied in greater detail. They set in motion the same groups which are found in debates on environmental issues in other sites: local residents, transport workers, individual and commercial road users, local authorities, transport companies.

### **3.3. Labour markets**

Ports concentrate within their ambit a great variety of transport professions. These specialists need to be trained, their skills rewarded. In some cases, transport employers grant them a permanent status and benefits to ensure their loyalty. Local labour markets have offered a wide array of employment arrangements from civil servants in public monopolies, to short-term hiring by a multiplicity of subcontractors, co-operatives of independent operators and large private concerns. All had to face the irregularity of sea transport, and transport activity in general, and find ways to compensate slack times with periods of peak traffic. These workers, professionals and petty operators depended for their livelihood on the long-term viability of the port as a transport hub and were severely hurt when traffic definitively moved away from their home base.

### **3.4. The spectacle of ports**

Finally ports have an undeniable cultural dimension as the imaginary gateway to the world, to exotic lands and freedom. The spectacle of the port activity, the gigantic size of the machinery and port facilities, the variety of languages, national origin and professions, the neighbourhoods where sailors congregated in bars and brothels, have been a tourist attraction for a long time. The transformations of modes of transport have sometimes caused the removal of this picturesque scene from the city centre to distant areas, and cities have tried to recreate the lively spirit of the port as a transport hub with often disappointing waterfront reconversion projects and shopping malls. Don't railway stations and airports exercise a similar attraction on sedentary populations? This raises the question of the sight of busy transportation connections as a cultural activity.