Integrating the Port and the City of Rijeka onto the international scene: the Rijeka Gateway Project

In the 1990s the necessity to stop the steady decrease of Port of Rijeka traffic volume imposed a new strategy and development plans to re-boost and ensure the competitiveness of the Port of Rijeka. Based on a study prepared by the consultants of Rotterdam Maritime Group, the new Master plan and Port Modernisation Project – The Rijeka Gateway Project – got the support of The World Bank through a series of loans which were granted between 2003 and 2009. The partial relocation of port activities out of the city centre makes room for new urban developments on the waterfront and, in parallel for a new quality of life for the whole city.

The Rijeka Gateway Project is now entering in a decisive implementing phase. The Port and the City of Rijeka are both AIVP members since many years. M. Vojko Obersnel, Mayor of Rijeka City, discussed with us the main stakes and challenges of this project and how it will enhance the attractiveness of the Port and the City, giving to the Port City of Rijeka a new role on the international scene.

**AIVP - The Rijeka Gateway Project has two main port components:** on the Western part of the port with the new development of the port facilities at Zagreb Pier, and on the East with the redevelopment and expansion of the Brajdica Container Terminal. A design and construction contract has been signed in April 2012 with Italian companies for the first phase of the Zagreb Pier Container Terminal. ICTSI, which became a majority shareholder in the concessionaire of the Brajdica Container Terminal in early 2011, has begun its upgrading.

M. Obersnel, as many other port cities around the world, the Port of Rijeka is now engaged in a redevelopment on itself. This one combines a rationalisation of the existing port areas and uses, with their partial expansions. Could you summarize which are the main aims of these two projects, the current state of their implementation and their schedules?
M. Obersnel, Mayor of Rijeka City:

Briefly, the Rijeka Gateway Project will revive and promote the importance and the effectiveness of the Rijeka Transportation Route within the European Union and hinterland outside of the EU. At the same time, this is a transportation route of great national importance. Between Rijeka and the Croatian-Hungarian border, it fosters life and economical activities and involves somehow more than 2.5 Million people located in the most developed Croatian counties and cities. Honestly, we are fully aware that, excluding highways, the other two components of this transportation route, the port and the railways need to be modernized, radically and fast if we want to keep pace with other traffic axes. So, the Brajdica Terminal, which is completed and by beginning of July this year it should be in full function, gives us a chance to enhance the container turnover yearly up to 600,000 TEU. After the 1st phase of construction by 2017, the Zagreb Pier Terminal will help to raise the yearly turnover of containers through port of Rijeka to more than 1 Million TEU.

The construction of the second phase of the Zagreb Pier Terminal can additionally enlarge total port capacity up to 1.2 Million TEU; however this phase will depend on future concessionaire. Apart from the containers, our port will mark a remarkable turnover of liquid cargo (5-8 Million tons yearly), general and bulk cargo (4-5 Million tons yearly). Summarizing all these facts, I would say that the final aims refer not just to reviving the transporting role, but also to provoking the transformation impact on the Croatian economy, by attracting new investments and developing new technologies.
On the 20th May 2013 a large ship from China reached the Adriatic Gate Container Terminal - AGCT, an ICTSI Group Company, managing and operating the Brajdica Container Terminal in Rijeka. The ship brought new equipment: 10 new cranes (2 Post Panamax size quayside gantry cranes, 6 Rubber Tired Ganttries (RTG – cranes for the storage area) and 2 Rail Mounted Ganttries (RMG – cranes for the rail area). The new equipment is expected to be in full function by the beginning of July 2013.

And, the newly constructed BIP (Border Inspection Point) station, as a prerequisite for Croatia to join the EU as from July 1st onwards: all cargo of animal or vegetable origin which is imported into the European Union has to be inspected within the port(s). The presence of BIP station at AGCT will enable Rijeka to be the first Port of Call on the North Adriatic.

AIVP - The current port activities, and the planned ones, are quite close to the City. Which negative impacts of the previous port activities will be minored or even cancelled thanks to the new port developments? And which integration measures are planned to reduce the possible remaining negative impacts?
M. Obersnel:

The most important improvement will happen within the city centre. After removing certain port facilities, the urban renewal of the Delta area and the Baross Port will be enabled. However, the activities of the container terminals will eventually bring some negative impact related to noise and light, which have already caused complains from citizens who live in the vicinity of the Brajdica Container Terminal, as it is located pretty close to the residential areas.

The Urban Renewal of the Delta Area

We have resolved some of the bad impacts, such as the lighting. The monitoring system will soon be activated, so we intend to have the full control over the situation and the possibility to influence the work process in order to avoid conflict situations.

Delta Area and the Baross Port

AIVP - One of the objectives of the Rijeka Gateway Project is to re-open the city to the sea. Cities and Ports around the world are often confronted with the problem of physical barriers (highways, railways, etc…) between the city and the sea. In Rijeka, a marshalling yard and railways used for the port activities constitute such a barrier. But railway is also a more sustainable transport mode for port activities.

Which solutions are considered to solve such a dilemma and to combine opening the city to the sea while preserving sustainable transports for a port traffic that is planned to increase?
M. Obersnel:

The best and the final solution for the railway connections in Rijeka will be the new railway bypass. Unfortunately, the present economic situation forces us to look for other, easier and cheaper solutions. One of such solutions is giving up the shore railway (we plan to use it for the city railway), and the other solution refers to the reconstruction of existing railway crossing the city area. By implementing the modern criteria in the reconstruction of the railway, conflicts with the urban area should be avoided. This means that the conflict crossings of the railway with the roads and pedestrian corridors will be resolved as well as the problems of noise, vibrations etc.

The railway should be used also for public transportation. The parts of railway that are visible in the urban area and citizens’ access spots (as it will become a city railway) should be arranged as attractive as possible. We think that such measures can break the idea of the railway as a barrier.

Implementing of modern criteria in the reconstruction of the railway and port infrastructure

aiVP - On the Western port, some warehouses will be demolished and other ones rehabilitated for new port functions. But the existing huge grain silos are also a visual and physical barrier between the City and the Sea. It was envisaged to have them demolished and rebuilt 15 kms away in a new port zone. Is that still planned? Does their reconversion to urban functions has also been considered initially?

M. Obersnel:

To demolish the grain silos or to rehabilitate them – the question is still open. The solution will resolve from the development policy of the Rijeka port systems. We have to be open and admit that these questions are not our priority. The core of our interest lies in the fastest possible modernization of the railway and the construction of new specialized container terminals. However, when tackling the interventions with gradual effects, we cannot refrain from giving services to handle other types of cargo.
Between the Eastern and the Western part of the Port and the City, the Delta / Porto Baros areas is the third component of the Rijeka Gateway Project. These areas were used for port activities (mainly for the handling and storage of timber) until the middle of 2012. Their relocation to other parts of the port makes room for a new Port/City interface. 17 ha are concerned of which 13.7 ha for urban development, 1.8 ha for a marina and 2.2 ha for public infrastructures and parks.

The project includes the construction of a new passenger terminal within the existing passenger pier. It will enhance the attractiveness of Rijeka as a passenger port. Which are the expected growth in the passenger traffic and the possible economic impact on the City?

M. Obersnel:

The first phase of the maritime passenger terminal has already been constructed at the breakwater foot. Unfortunately, the seasonal character of travelling, the shortage of connection lines between Rijeka and the islands in catchment area as well as other cities along the Croatian coast, has been affecting us by a decreasing trend of passengers during last four years. So, our important task is to make our Port more attractive to cruise operators, and also to keep on requesting from the Ministry of the Maritime Affairs, Transport and Infrastructure of the Republic of Croatia to significantly enhance the local sea traffic.
**AIVP** - Which kind of passenger terminal is planned? A “mono-functional one” solely dedicated to port functions or is there a possibility to implement a facility mixing port and urban functions (shops, restaurants, views, public spaces, etc…) as we can observe now more and more in other port cities?

**M. Obersnel:**

We have in mind a passenger terminal that involves both, the content of a passenger terminal and the contents dedicated to citizens and visitors. Moreover, the Terminal is situated next to the Baross Port and its contents should be interesting also to the nautical tourist. Generally speaking, the urban redevelopment project will show additional directions for the development of contents on the Passenger Terminal and in its vicinity.

**AIVP** The possible guidelines and requirements for the development of the Delta & Porto Baros areas have been prepared by Cowi Consultants and Gehl Architects from Copenhagen, Denmark. They suggested a division in three districts: a park district on the Northern part, the closest to the city centre; a maritime district on the South directly opened to the sea and connected to the marina planned on the Baros zone; and, in-between, an urban district. A large part is reserved for free spaces as the total building volume is limited to 40% of the whole area (1.2 million m³).

Could you summarize which are the main components of the planned built facilities and how they will complement the existing ones of the city centre?

**M. Obersnel:**

I have to partly correct the initial context of your question. In their study, Cowi Consultants and Gehl Architects just followed a land use of Delta area and Baross Port envisaged by the Physical Plan of the City of Rijeka, approved in 2003. Thementioned Plan divides the Delta area into two main portions: the northern, envisaged to be arranged as a City park, encompassing 4 ha of land between the river and the canal, and the southern portion of 12 ha approx., located also between the river and the canal, but open to the sea and directly connected with Baross Port, with stunning views on the Rijeka bay, the islands, the mountains and the rest of the city. This portion of the Delta area is recognized as a mixed use area with a combination of residential and business area, retail, services, public, hotel and facilities of all kinds.

The interface with the marina and its facilities should bring a new identity and add something unique that does not already exist in the city. The structure within the Delta Area should be of a new character and not a copy of existing city structures. But, due to worthy and recognizable existing city centre, the Delta area should in the same time be developed as an extension of the city centre. Precisely, the old part of the City centre and the new one
AIVP - Two landmark buildings could be constructed according to Gehl Architects: one in the “urban district” and the other one in the “Maritime District”. Which kind of equipment could be used and for which functions?

M. Obersnel:

Usually, the landmarks are iconic buildings in terms of height, design, position, typology and/or similar properties. We have not already précised which buildings and how many of them have to be designed and developed in such a way, which also emerged from our concept of urban planning and architectural design. Namely, the first step will be the launching of public competition for urban design of the Delta area and Baross Port at the beginning of June and will last till the beginning of October 2013. This competition will be of international character, but under one condition: the architects and urban planners from outside of Croatia can participate if they would engage at least one Croatian architect. Further developers are expected to be selected through international bidding procedure next year, and they will be obliged to develop the site in accordance with the best of entries from the previous competition. So, in direct negotiation between the City, the developer and the public opinion, we also expect to define the landmarks.

AIVP - Gehl Architects has also suggested a phasing strategy aimed at developing first the facilities which could attract people and visitors on the redeveloped areas with the double objective of generating revenues and attracting private investors and partners for the following stages. Such a strategy could be considered in other port cities projects and will be of great interest to the members of AIVP. Could you explain it further?

M. Obersnel:

The (re)development in phases is acceptable due to many reasons. We are fully aware that at this moment the Baross Port could be converted into a marina very quickly and without big expenditures. But the final proposal of phases will reflect a real relationship between the specific investors’ expectations and the real estate market respond.

AIVP - To conclude, such projects are of course a long way process, sometimes generating some impatience from the citizens and partners. Even that is still an on-going project, which are the main lessons you can emphasize till now and which are your main expectations in the close future?
M. Obersnel:

The citizens are impatient, indeed, and so are the experts, which are not to be forgotten, because the Delta urbanization project is recognized as a project of the century and as an opportunity to create new jobs and to realize the best achievements in urbanism, architecture, public space arrangement. The future investors and developers should also be aware of this. Many examples in the world confirm my words and show that similar principles had to be obeyed.

The Delta Area should inspire the city with new life and good vibrations. The new attractions in the area should add value to the existing city life in Rijeka and support the already progressing development of other city functions (university, port, green industries, etc.) in order to constitute the city as to become more attractive for new citizens who will choose Rijeka as a temporary or permanent place to live.

The city of Rijeka has a desire for an identity related to water, events, health, sport, culture, nature and food. Rijeka has a strong potential for practicing a natural way of living with beaches, mountains and walking tracks. In relation to other towns and cities in the region, Rijeka can offer unique cultural activities. In developing the Delta Area, these identities could be reached and even expanded.