



Philippe Demoulin

General Manager
Havencentrum Lillo
Antwerp, Belgium

► Port information center as an essential instrument in reconnecting ports and citizens

*Centros de información portuaria:
elementos fundamentales de la
reconexión entre el puerto y sus
ciudadanos*

*Les centres d'information portuaire:
éléments essentiels de la reconnexion
entre le port et les citoyens*

Philippe Demoulin holds a Master's degree in Business Management (KU Leuven) and a Diploma in International Relations (SAIS, Johns Hopkins University). He has previously held positions in business companies (Alcatel, SITEL), in charge of international business development and general management, both abroad (Tanzania, Russia) and in Belgium. He is currently a member of the board of directors of the Chamber of Commerce of Antwerp. Since 2006 he has been general manager of the Havencentrum Lillo (Lillo Port Centre), the information and visitors' centre in the port of Antwerp, Belgium. His main focus is on the areas of creating public support for the port and related sectors, and promoting sustainable business. He is co-author of the book published in 2010 "LogAnt – the province of Antwerp, a world of logistics". philippe.demoulin@havencentrum.be. www.portcentre.com

abstract

Part 1: background – on the importance of port information centres in reconnecting ports and citizens

Ports and their related activities do not generate a great deal of public interest. Some even feel that their image has turned negative in the eyes of the public, often reinforced by media bringing only the negative news. According to Philippe Demoulin, it is more a issue of indifference rather than dislike. There are several reasons why the public has become ignorant and indifferent about their nearby port.

Ports have come to realize that it is essential to work on increasing this interest again because their indifference or even objection to the ports operations or infrastructure works can be a huge obstacle. A port information centre is a crucial instrument in regenerating this connection between the ports and citizens.

Part 2: the European experience – 3 port information centres and their network

The Lillo Port Centre (Havencentrum Lillo) was the first such centre when it was established in 1988 in the port of Antwerp by the province authorities. It now has a wide range of services, a budget of about 1 million euros per annum, 10 permanent staff and a team of 75 port guides. A overview of the Havencentrum Lillo will be given together with the Genoa Port Centre and the EIC Mainport Rotterdam. Other similar initiatives exist, and several new port centres are planned throughout Europe.

The port centres maintain regular contact through a network supported by AIVP as a system of information sharing and practical cooperation.

Part 3: project initiation – guidelines on setting up a port centre

Philippe Demoulin will provide take-home information for those considering the setting up of a port information centre, starting with the fundamental question "what is the story of your port?"

resumen

Parte 1 : Contexto - Sobre la importancia de los centros de información portuaria para volver a poner en contacto a puertos y ciudadanos

Los puertos y las actividades relacionadas con ellos no generan mucho interés público. Algunos incluso creen que su imagen se ha vuelto negativa a ojos de la ciudadanía, lo que se ve reforzado por la aparición de noticias exclusivamente negativas en los medios de comunicación. De acuerdo con Philippe Demoulin,

es más una cuestión de indiferencia que de desagrado. Hay varias razones por las que la actitud del público ha pasado a ser de ignorancia e indiferencia sobre los puertos cercanos.

Los puertos se han percatado de que es esencial trabajar para fomentar este interés de nuevo, ya que la indiferencia o incluso la oposición a las actividades portuarias o sus infraestructuras puede ser un gran obstáculo. Un centro de información portuaria es un instrumento vital para regenerar esta conexión entre los puertos y los ciudadanos.

Parte 2 : La experiencia europea - Tres puertos de información portuaria y sus redes

El centro portuario de Lillo (Havencentrum Lillo) fue el primero de su clase cuando las autoridades provinciales lo crearon en 1988 en el puerto de Amberes. Ahora cuenta con una amplia gama de servicios, un presupuesto anual de 1 millón de euros, 10 empleados permanentes y un equipo de 75 guías del puerto. Además del Havencentrum Lillo, se muestra una perspectiva general del centro portuario de Génova y del EIC Mainport Rotterdam. Existen otras iniciativas similares, y en toda Europa hay planificados centros portuarios.

Los centros portuarios mantienen un contacto regular a través de una red que cuenta con el apoyo de la AIVP y que supone un sistema de intercambio de información y cooperación práctica.

Parte 3 : Inicio del proyecto: directrices para establecer un centro portuario

Philippe Demoulin proporciona información útil para quienes estén considerando establecer un centro de información portuaria, que empieza con una pregunta fundamental: «¿Cuál es la historia de su puerto?»

résumé

Partie 1 : contexte - de l'importance des centres portuaires pour renouer le lien entre les ports et les citoyens

Les ports et les activités qui y sont liées ne suscitent pas beaucoup d'intérêt de la part du public. Certains pensent même que le public a souvent une image négative du monde portuaire, image négative généralement renforcée par les médias qui ne véhiculent, la plupart du temps, que les mauvaises nouvelles. Selon Philippe Demoulin, il s'agit plus d'indifférence que d'antipathie. Il existe plusieurs raisons expliquant le désintérêt et l'indifférence du public pour le port situé près de chez eux.

Les ports se rendent compte qu'il est essentiel de travailler pour susciter cet intérêt car l'indifférence ou même l'aversion pour les activités portuaires ou les travaux d'infrastructure peut constituer un véritable obstacle. Un centre portuaire est un outil primordial permettant de faire revivre ce lien entre les ports et les citoyens.

Partie 2 : l'expérience européenne - 3 centres portuaires et leur réseau

Le Centre portuaire Lillo (Havencentrum Lillo), créé en 1988 dans le port d'Anvers par les autorités provinciales, fut le premier centre de ce type. Actuellement, il offre de nombreux services et possède un budget d'environ 1 million d'euros par an, 10 employés permanents ainsi qu'une équipe de 75 guides portuaires. Un aperçu du Centre portuaire Lillo sera donné en même temps que la description du Centre portuaire de Gênes et du Centre EIC de Rotterdam. D'autres initiatives du même type existent et plusieurs nouveaux centres portuaires sont attendus dans toute l'Europe.

Les centres portuaires communiquent régulièrement entre eux grâce à un réseau supporté par l'AIVP servant de système de partage d'informations et de coopération pratique.

Partie 3 : initiation de projet - guide pour la mise en place d'un centre portuaire

Philippe Demoulin fournira des informations pratiques pour les personnes voulant mettre en place un centre portuaire, en commençant par la question fondamentale : « quelle est l'histoire de votre port ? ».



Port information center as an essential instrument in reconnecting ports and citizens

1. Introduction –

On the importance of port information centres in reconnecting ports and citizens

Ports and their related activities do not generate a great deal of interest amongst the general public. Some experts even feel that the image of ports has turned negative in the eyes of the public, and that this is often reinforced by the media bringing only the negative news. However, in our eyes, it is more a matter of indifference rather than dislike.

There are several reasons why the public has become ignorant and indifferent about the port:

- the port has lost its visibility – its location has in most cases moved from the centre of town to a remote location;
- visitors do not feel welcome any more in the port area, largely due to the security measures that have been installed in the last decade;
- the link between the activities in the port and daily life is not obvious any more¹;
- the port is now seen as a purely economic activity, and its contribution to visual, esthetic, intellectual, social aspects of community life (i.e. its soft values ²) is largely forgotten.

Ports have come to realize that it is essential to work on stimulating this interest again:

- the people are stakeholders in several roles – they are neighbours of the port, potential voters for the local government, and potential employees of port companies³;
- their indifference or even objection to the ports operations or infrastructure works can be a huge obstacle.

In the ports of Antwerp (Belgium), Rotterdam (Netherlands), and Genova (Italy), information and visitors centres have successfully been operating for some years. Their experience proves that a port information centre is a crucial instrument in regenerating the connection between the ports and citizens, because:

- a continuous and permanent effort is the most effective way to reach out to the public, not (only) once a year events;
- as in other fields, more than a one-way communication campaign is needed to achieve change;
- a dedicated team is needed to maintain knowledge of the ever changing port area and activities;
- a permanent information and/or exhibition space is needed.

There is a huge potential in their type of activities to generate public support for the port and related sectors, because we act as a two-way communication channel. We bring our information but we also capture the potential feedback from these stakeholders – in our case over 40,000 per year.

2. The European experience –

Three port information centres and their network

Over 62,000 persons are employed directly in the port of Antwerp, and another 90.000 indirectly! We therefore see it as the mission of the Lillo Port Centre to promote the port as an important economic sector, even the most important source of economic prosperity.

The Lillo Port Centre (Havencentrum Lillo) was the first centre of its kind when it was established in 1988 in the port of Antwerp by the province authorities. It is registered as a non-profit organization with a budget of about 1 million euros per annum, of which 70% is covered by the province of Antwerp. The Lillo Port Centre employs 10 permanent staff and a team of 80 port guides.

¹ Alain de Botton, *The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 2009

² For a useful overview of soft values and their management, see Eric Van Hooydonk, *Soft Values of Seaports – a Strategy for the Restoration of Public Support for Seaports*, Garant, Antwerp, 2007, 191 p.

³ For an extensive view on management of all stakeholders, see Michaël Dooms, *Crafting the Integrative Value Proposition for Large Scale Transport Infrastructure Hubs: a Stakeholder Management Approach*, Brussels University Press, 2010, 388 p.

We offer a range of services to the public:

- our guided tours, tailored to the profile, interest, and language of the group;
- a permanent exhibition of ca. 800 m²;
- information and events;
- events;
- meeting accommodation;
- place of refuge, in case of a calamity at one of the chemical plants nearby.

With the Antwerp Port Authorities we have a clear arrangement that they organize the visits for delegations who are of economic or political importance to them (about 250 groups per year), and we take charge of the visitors with a more general background (about 1,900 groups per year). Two thirds of our visitors are students. Ten percent of the visitors are foreigners.

Our mission can be summarized in one sentence: we aim to provide our visitors with an unforgettable experience - we want them to go back home after the visit with a “whaw” feeling.

In one visit we aim to give our visitors an overview and insight in this area of 130 km²: the historical evolution, the impressive infrastructure, the different activities and products, and last but not least the job opportunities. To bring this content a very useful structure is the classical triple bottom line or 3 “P”s of sustainable business, since we show them aspects relating to the People, the Planet and Profit.

Given our role we are considered the “ambassadors of the port of Antwerp”, and also “the insiders of the port”, because of our detailed knowledge about the port. This knowledge is used to support our guides, but more and more in other ways. For example, we recently completed a project on international logistics with the Institute of Maritime Management and Transport (University of Antwerp), resulting in a book that is easily readable by the general public, and an extensive website linked to this.⁴

The aspects we give a lot of attention to are:

- to keep our knowledge up to date in a constantly changing sector and area;
- to bring our message on the right wavelength for the whole gamut of our visitors, from young schoolchildren over teenagers to senior citizens;
- to become a two-way communication channel, by not just bringing our message but also listening to the impressions, questions, and feedback of our visitors.

We have a good working relationship with our colleagues in other European ports. The following table gives a description of the most important port information centers in terms of both the common and specific characteristics; the Genoa Port Centre, the EIC Mainport Rotterdam, and the Havencentrum Lillo (Lillo Port Centre, Antwerpen).

⁴ For this publication on international logistics, check our website www.logant.be

	Antwerp	Rotterdam	Genova
<i>established</i>	1988	1993	2009
<i>Mission</i>	To promote the port as the source of economic prosperity	To be the port entrance for young people – organizer and facilitator	To experience the port and discover the reasons if its appeal
<i>Target public</i>	Students, adults, professionals	students	Students, general public, tourists
<i>location</i>	In the centre of the port, about 20 km from the city centre	In the centre of the port, about 20 km from the city centre	In the historic port, close to the city centre
<i>Offering</i>	guided visits to the port and the exhibition, events, information and publications, projects, educational activities,... with a focus on generating public support	guided visits to the port and exhibition, information and publications, projects, activities in schools,... with a focus on young people	individual visits to the exhibition, guided visits, information and publications, projects, educational activities,...
<i>Visitors per year</i>	ca. 42,000	ca. 22,000	Ca. 14,000 in its first year
<i>Structural partners</i>	Province of Antwerp	Local maritime institute, Port Authorities, federation of companies	13 founders (Province of Liguria, university of Genova, port authorities, ...) and 33 partners
<i>For more information</i>	www.havencentrum.be www.portcentre.com www.centreportuaire.com	www.eic-mainport.nl	www.genoaportcenter.org

Other similar initiatives exist, such as the information centre for the Maasvlakte 2 expansion project in Rotterdam and the Portaal van Vlaanderen, the information centre at the sealock in Terneuzen, Netherlands. In addition to this, several new port centres are planned throughout Europe.

Between the port information centres we maintain regular contact through a network supported by AIVP as a system of information sharing and practical cooperation.

3. Project initiation – guidelines on setting up a port centre

The take-home information for those considering setting up a port information centre:

- who are your stakeholders?
- therefore what is your target public?
- which target segments are the must / need / nice to reach?
- what is their interest (burning issues, future projects, school curriculum, ...)
- what will be the focus of the information – the past, present, or future of the port?
- who are the potential partners in the project, public and private?
- how can existing knowledge in other organization be made available or integrated?
- what are the available levers to attract the public – education programmes, recruitment channels, infrastructure projects, ...?
- what is the potential involvement of the local companies – financial, information, access to their premises, strategy,...?
- What is the possible link to government policy – providing information, acting as a communication channel, reaching out to stakeholders, ...?
- do you prefer the events / short term approach (where outsourcing and more flexibility is possible) or long term commitment?
- can the visitor groups have access to the port area and the premises of port companies?
- how far from the port is the potential location for the visitor centre?
- is public transport available?
- how far from the city center is the potential location?
- what is the available space, newly built or in an existing building?
- can it be integrated into existing premises that are linked to the port?
- what funding can be made available, both for the investment and the recurrent cost?
- and above all, what is the story of your port?

Philippe Demoulin
general manager, Havencentrum Lillo
Antwerp, Belgium

www.portcentre.com
philippe.demoulin@havencentrum.be
Telephone +32 3 5699012