

Port life during the novel coronavirus emergency

Tiziana Murgia, Communication Executive at Assoport, (Italy) is the author of the following English text. This text is an introduction to a longer publication in Italian about the port situation in Italy facing the Covid-19 crisis and entitled: ["le autorità di sistema portuale italiane di fronte all'emergenza covid-19: crisi definitiva o occasione di rilancio del loro ruolo nell'ambito marittimo-portuale?"](#).

For the first time in history, cruise ships are not travelling around the world due to the COVID-19 global emergency. However, not only this has stopped being the way it used to be. Cities, ports and port life has changed. Logistics is now subject to new and updated safety and health measures which seem at first to have complicated the flow of cargo but are necessary to maintain a safe and secure supply to hospitals, supermarkets and the industries that continue to work for each country.

In the past, the Cruise Industry had had difficult moments, after terrorist attacks and certainly after some serious accidents like the Costa Concordia one. Now the whole system has been affected – shipyards, terminal operators, travel agencies, tourist guides, drivers, suppliers and so on.

Today, the crisis is global for this industry as it has been entirely stopped and cannot be considered essential for the country in a pandemic crisis.

According to UNCTAD, 80% of cargo travels via sea and it is therefore essential that National Governments try to facilitate as much as possible the flow of traffic and keep ports fully operational, as these provide goods that are essential for the population and for the health system.

Ports and maritime traffic are a substantial part of global economy a connection that ensures stable economies, markets, industries and a large part of the transport of people.

At present, the epidemic state of countries is an uncontrollable variable as has been declared by health authorities and high-level scientific panels. It is therefore possible that the request of essential goods may increase, as well as food and medical needs, and this makes those countries without sea, dependent on the nearby ports to have access to goods.

Restrictions on cargo handling and the blocks on borders could have a negative impact on the novel Coronavirus itself, interrupting the supply of essential goods for hospitals, companies, for citizens themselves. The continuity of international trade is a priority that has been requested by the maritime industry on the whole. It is necessary to safeguard the conditions of health and safety of maritime workers. The restrictions on access to ports and the quarantine measures have had a serious effect of crew members, with an effect on shifts. A priority is also that of containing the risk of the spread of the disease among port workers, that could damage cargo flow especially due to the media communication that would result.

To face this pandemic period, institutions in Italy are moving in an already difficult situation where an emergency can really be devastating. It is important to underline that generally the operational employees are those who pay the highest price of the lack of organization.

Regarding port workers, it is now almost a month in which they are having to adapt to a continuously difficult situation that is changing on a daily basis due to the variable aspects of the virus that remain still unknown even to the high-level scientists. Ports are usually always on the front lines because they have this vital role of shipping and handling goods and people. This new situation in which people have been asked to stay home, changing habits and not having access to many goods directly in shops that are also temporarily closed and/or are not accessible as before due to physical distancing to avoid further spreading of the disease.

Due to this new scenario, the Italian Port Network authorities together have asked the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport to launch a coordinated task force so that all ports and connected logistic chains

function in the same manner and follow the same type of procedures. This emergency has brought together all the presidents of the Port Authorities in the need and prospect of finding the right solutions to all the connected difficulties that ports are facing due to the COVID-19 emergency.

Starting from a list of simple measures enforced both in maritime and port fields in Italy, the article tries to give a detailed outlook on the first month of the crisis in Italy, that has modified work modalities and procedures, which may modify some areas in the future as well. If, as stated in texts, the state of emergency is one of those cases that pushes towards an organization that must be able to adapt itself and transform itself to face the new elements (Morin, 1976) in the case we are facing, this aspect has come to be in all fields.

If workforce today has been modified in all its traditional aspects, the general feeling of resilience and resistance has come through strongly. In particular, in Port Authorities have modified regular working shifts, introducing new and technological change that probably would not have done without this emergency. At the same time, operational workforce has been treated with new and revised safety measures to avoid the spreading of the disease.

The Italian Government has issued diverse measures from the 8th of March onwards, with, at first, small area closures in those Regions with the highest number of people with COVID-19, moving on to some travel restrictions, then to a wider closure of the country and finally to a lockdown of all activities excluding food and medicine related activities on the 22nd March.

The effects of this closure travelled around the globe and many countries, during this period, banned Italian people, goods and crew members from their ports, creating a difficult and confusing situation. Many of the countries that at first banned Italian related goods and people, after a couple of weeks had developed local spread of the disease that today has put them in lockdown similar to the one applied in Italy.

What has clearly come to be at the moment is that globally, countries were not prepared to face this type of emergency, mainly due to the fact that investments in health and research are not at the centre of economic growth for many. Regarding ports, we can see the importance of working together with territories, especially with regards to coordinated actions to save lives and ensure safety of crew and people working in ports.

Certainly, the cruise sector has had and probably will continue to have a strong and harsh effect due to this virus that has restricted passenger travel around the world. In Italy, these restrictions continue as well. Relations between territories and ports in this case will be essential in the following phases, as can be seen in the detailed article attached.

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