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Synthesis of works proposed by Tom Daamen and Isabelle Vries

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2016 World Conference of the International Association of Cities and Ports Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Crossovers between City and Port

By Tom Daamen and Isabelle Vries

13 October 2016 – Interaction. That was one of the key objectives of the organisers of the AIVP 15th World Conference. Almost 400 business professionals, policymakers and academics from all over the world met in Rotterdam from 5 to 7 October. They explored crossovers between port and city—crossovers for economic and social innovations fuelled by new technologies, innovative businesses and new planning strategies between city and port.

For many of those attending the conference, the former submarine facility that now forms part of the RDM Campus was a strange space. Large conferences often take place in conventional conference venues or hotels, but the hosting organisers in Rotterdam convinced AIVP that the theme, the location *and* the programme of the conference had to be unconventional. This push for the unconventional had everything to do with a reality that many in the Dutch port city have become fully aware of in recent years: while becoming an attractive city with a successful port, Rotterdam still faces considerable economic, social and spatial challenges.

In spite of the numerous differences between the world's port cities, the major issues they face are similar in many respects. Climate change, energy transition and the development of “disruptive” technologies featured in almost every presentation given at the conference. Solutions are not readily available, however. Next to introducing new technologies, many port cities find that social innovation and the related engagement of citizens is even a greater challenge, as Thato Tsautse - managing director of the maritime cluster in Durban - clearly underlined during the opening sessions.

It proves difficult for many port city authorities to enforce sustainable solutions inside their territories due to the fierce competition between ports and the lack of internal incentives for innovation in the maritime transport sector. Hence, progressive port authorities face a dilemma. Allard Castelein, President of the Port of Rotterdam Authority, is encouraging innovation and sustainability. However, he explained that “achieving that aim also requires, for example, increasing the price of CO₂ emissions, which can only be done effectively if all countries participate.”

Six themes

The conference in Rotterdam focused on six, partly overlapping themes: circular economy, innovative business, smart technologies, joint planning strategies, climate resilience and social innovation. An introduction to the smart technologies theme was provided by a keynote presentation of smart cities guru Boyd Cohen, who's projects include Barcelona's 22@ urban renewal programme. He posed several questions, such as how open and transparent data and governance can be integrated between a port and city (and its citizens). Using London as an example, Cohen showed how people and businesses can identify opportunities and solve problems together.

Mitigation, described by those who spoke about climate resilience as fighting short-term symptoms, is not enough to deal with the effects of climate change. Long-term investments in adaptation are extremely important. However, turning such investments into a reality will take a fundamental change in culture. This starts with finding a common language—one that defines words like resilience much more clearly. According to the rapporteurs, political will and investments will follow. Sectoral systems must become more closely linked and, through the open sharing of knowledge, scientific know-how must support decision-making. This will for example make it possible to link already necessary investments in infrastructure to climate adaptation measures and other innovations in a smart way.

It was of no surprise that leadership was referred to as a crucial factor in several discussions of the themes. There are many uncertainties regarding circularity, innovation and adaptation. Nine out of ten start-ups fail. CEO Grace Sai of Impact Hub - a network that functions as an innovation lab, a business incubator and a social enterprise community centre - emphasised that this is also the case in Singapore. Unlike in many European countries, the attitude in Singapore seems to be that failing is part of the process. Entrepreneurship is synonymous with taking risks. Failures mean steep learning curves, experiences that, through knowledge sharing, will ultimately lead to success.

The AIVP conference offered several inspiring keynote presentations. One of them was given by Maarten Hajer, professor of Urban Futures, who spoke about inevitable decarbonisation, and the importance of "imaginaries". Novel perspectives are crucial for forging new coalitions and breaking free of the ideas and structures of modernity that enabled us to take major steps forward in the past, but are now impeding

meaningful progress. According to Carla Jong of the Port of Amsterdam, one of the theme moderators for circular economy, many port cities are already on the right track. She stated that staying on course will nonetheless take “boldness”, since the road ahead is undoubtedly a rocky one. Despite all of the synergy maps and beautiful visions, cooperation will ultimately have to take place between parties that barely know each other. Achieving such cooperation is an enormous challenge. In addition, solutions must often be implemented at a level of scale that differs from the one at which the problem is occurring (such as the CO₂ reduction referred to above). This is likewise a challenge. Nevertheless, one key objective has already been reached: we are becoming aware of the importance of diversity among the parties involved, and of differences in scale between problem and solution.

Planning in uncertainty

The theme of joint planning strategies was focused on the question as to how spatial planning and development can support the innovation that is required in port cities. An argument made by Canadian researcher Peter Hall on the first day of the conference was reiterated once again at the end: sites between port and city are permanently unfinished. Plans must therefore be flexible. In other words, plans must be made “for the meantime”. Climate adaptation has a different planning horizon than the development of business incubators or the creation of social innovation, such as the training and retraining of technicians at the RDM Campus. Nevertheless, according to the rapporteurs, all of the themes must be taken into account simultaneously and must not be allowed to stagnate. “We need to plan incompletely. Since we don’t know exactly what the future economy of the port city will be, we will need to plan for uncertain functions.”

None of the theme-based discussions addressed the question as to who must take the initiative and what bodies need assume a leading role. The answer differs according to theme, location and point in time in the process. There was general agreement, however, that there is a role for politics, government authorities, private sector parties *and* individual citizens. They must all contribute, on different levels of scale, to the innovations and interventions required, and each will be “in the lead” at different points in time. Both people and businesses have to experience the benefits, where do they go to in the ‘chain’. So this needs new types of business cases. CEOs and politicians must show new leadership. They will sometimes have to assume a coaching role in order to involve people from all layers and sectors in the process. It

will then be possible for port and city to rediscover each other and, through “bold imaginaries”, revitalise their relationships.

Main Conclusions from the rapporteurs in short:

- **Circular Economy** is driven by synergies; to achieve different material flows, it needs interaction of many stakeholders on different levels and needs tailor made governance. It is about economy, so about benefits as well, which should be passed on at the right place of the ‘circle’
- **Climate resilient** port cities need awareness, leadership and interconnectivity. Planners should work with communities and nature. They need better access to knowledge. Policy makers should create more stimulus and clear guidelines for businesses
- **Joint Planning Strategies** are needed for the areas between port and city, which must remain “incomplete” in order to adapt to dynamics and to provide space for experimenting and prototyping
- **Innovative Business Climate** can be established by attracting new businesses and bring them in contact with the “old” industries. Authorities, knowledge institutes and private parties should create intensive (informal) networks. These networks and actors should be made transparent, e.g. through visualisations.
- **Smart Green Technologies** need smart people to be successful, so people come first. Implementation is a matter of local context and conditions, but cooperation is in all cases the key success factor
- **Social Innovation** accounts for 75% of successful innovation, technology only 25%. Port Cities should draw up a Human Capital Agenda with a long-term strategy in order to create a resilient working community that is ready for the future.