



Large organisations' joint projects take centre stage at World Ports Conference

Characterised by cooperation

Is it the growing urgency of questions determining the future, the increasing fragmentation of the world, or simply an increasing willingness to cooperate? Be that as it may, large associations and organisations are increasingly joining forces to improve and promote the flow of goods through ports and thus global trade. Christian Doepgen gathered some impressions at the IAPH World Conference in Abu Dhabi.

Appeals to keep the big picture in mind frequently go as unheeded as do assertions that there's an overarching need to cooperate closely to pursue common goals. This, regrettably, is sometimes also true of the global organisations that represent the interests of maritime shipping worldwide.

The 2023 World Ports Conference, staged by the International Association of Ports and Harbors (IAPH) in Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates) at the beginning of November, opened a new chapter in this context, however. IAPH, whose 177 ports and 147 port company members account for around 60% of global container throughput, presented numerous overarching cooperation projects at its 2023 annual conference. A closing of the ranks with the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the World Bank was another element that became clear at the meeting, amongst other results.

Promote trade – with customs bodies

The expansion and acceleration of trade is in the interest of all parties involved in the flow of goods through ports. The fact that this can also include the customs authorities, which are usually perceived as a brake on operations, is one of the questions of improved cooperation in ports. Together, IAPH and WCO have broken new ground on this issue. The two parties have developed and published for the first time comprehensive guidelines on how customs authorities and port authorities can work together to facilitate trade.

Ricardo Treviño Chapa, the deputy secretary general of the WCO, and Pascal Ollivier, the chairman of the IAPH data cooperation committee, pointed out that more trade, higher cargo volumes, effective border management and the resilience of the supply chain in ports don't have to be at odds with each other. On the contrary, effective cooperation can achieve all these goals

equally. One of the prerequisites for this, amongst other things, are digital instruments and agreements between private and public stakeholders who can work together in the framework of a 'National Port Community Council'.

The plan's on the table – now the ball is in the court of port and customs authorities. In the 'IAPH/WCO Guidelines' published on the subject, special emphasis was placed on 'Small Island Developing States' (SIDS).

A meeting at the IAPH conference moderated by your author, *ITJ* editor-in-chief Christian Doepgen, addressed this matter. It saw IAPH managing director Patrick Verhoeven invite the more than 650 delegates to learn from the successful models presented in the eight case studies included in the guidelines.

IAPH and World Bank

Port communities were a leit-motif of the conference, for which representatives of the World Bank and the IAPH jointly presented a new 400-page study. The paper, prepared by 88 people in 24 months, includes practical examples from the world's busiest ports to archipelagos in the Caribbean and New Caledonia.

Periklis Saragiotis, one of the report's editors and lead authors, told the *ITJ* that emerging economies can continue to catch up through data exchange – just as they doubled their share of global exports to 30% between 1990 and 2019. According to Satya Prasad Sahu, also editor and lead author who works for the World Bank, the study offers a model solution to build successful port communities. Investments in automation and IT are key. *Christian Doepgen*



The IAPH's Pascal Ollivier (on the left) and the WCO's Ricardo Chapa jointly outlined guidelines to promote the flow of goods and of global trade.