

# Sustainability and community involvement in port redevelopment



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Many ports have unused or infrequently used buildings within the port area. Ports may have concentrated their main business activities into more compact and secure areas leaving them with resources that are costing them money to maintain without any current potential to generate income. The availability of land or buildings for such redevelopment may be the result of a decline in traditional industries or, conversely, improvements in port operations through more efficient cargo handling and improved logistics chains, or

where containerisation means that cargo operations are concentrated in larger ports. Where goods transit ports rapidly via improved road and rail links then there is less need for warehousing and an increase in empty buildings.

Ports need to either utilise their empty buildings and spaces to generate income, or sell them off for waterfront developments such as new housing, shopping centres, recreational facilities or office spaces. Waterfront developments around the Grand Harbour in Valetta,

Malta include the creation of a cruise ferry terminal, shopping centre and entertainment areas. In Hamburg, Germany they take the form of the HafenCity inner-city eco-development around the peripheries of the Port of Hamburg. Other major cities where redevelopment of waterfronts has taken place include Toronto and Montreal in Canada, Sydney and Adelaide in Australia, New York and Chicago in the US, Cardiff and London (docklands and Canary Wharf) in the UK, and Tokyo, Japan.



Many of the world's major cities, including London (pictured), have revitalised their waterfronts by making use of the available space.



Photo courtesy of 'The Deep'

Empty and disused buildings can be used to develop exhibitions of local marine life, such as The Deep, a large aquarium built near in Hull in the UK.

### European Sea Ports Organisation (ESPO) activities

Waterfront redevelopment offers the potential for ports to develop sustainably and with the involvement of their local communities. In Europe for example, ESPO published a Green Guide in 2012 on how to combine effective environmental management and effective port management to both improve port practice and improve community stakeholder relations. In 2013, ESPO announced its fifth Award on Societal Integration, that award examined how ports have sought to develop in a sustainable way with the involvement of local communities. The 2013 winner was the Port of Antwerp in Belgium and, in winning the 2013 Award, the Antwerp Port Authority not only sought to protect its port heritage through the restoration of buildings and renovation of quays, but it also made port buildings available for cultural projects.

Previous winners were the ports of Gijon, Spain in 2012, Helsinki, Finland (2011), Stockholm, Sweden (2010) and Genoa, Italy (2009). ESPO also, in 2010, produced a report on societal integration in ports, looking at how ports might redevelop empty buildings or unused waterfront areas in ways that go beyond the standard waterfront development to incorporate the idea of societal integration, where the local community is involved in port redevelopments and a positive relationship is formed between the port and its local community.

### Potential redevelopment opportunities for ports

There are a number of possible options when a port seeks to introduce sustainability within its core business and also to develop or improve links with its local community. These opportunities are relevant to ports irrespective of size

or location, as long as they have unused buildings or land which have the potential for redevelopment. These opportunities may be considered as 'add-ons' to normal port operations such as freight or ferry operations and, while they may not initially generate income, they will generate interest in the port and have the potential to offer new revenue streams in the future.

The ideas set out below are not the only possibilities: much will depend on the specific circumstances of the port and its surrounding community, and the needs of local businesses and local government. For the purposes of this article, the potential opportunities for development are discussed under four main headings: housing and accommodation, educational, cultural and heritage, and tourism opportunities.

### Housing and accommodation

Where ports have vacant buildings or unused land, one of the most common forms of redevelopment has been to sell this off for urban redevelopment, often in the form of expensive waterfront apartments. However, for some ports and communities, it may be a better option to redevelop existing buildings to provide low cost housing, mixed housing types, hostels or other types of accommodation. The feasibility of such a development will depend on a range of factors. These include: the type and state of the existing buildings; can they be made habitable or will they need to be replaced; how much investment is required; if they can be brought up to a habitable standard; who will undertake that work; is the port willing or able to fund the renovation; will it need a partner to share the costs; and, if the buildings do have to be replaced, should the port retain ownership of the land or sell it off to a developer.

For the mixed housing option, a port may sell off part of its available land stock for the building of expensive waterfront apartments, with a requirement that the developer also builds low cost housing for the local community or port employees on a separate port-owned piece of land. This option would have the benefit of providing affordable housing to keep local people in the area rather than them having to move away to find somewhere affordable to live. It could assist port employees in finding affordable housing and reduce transport emissions where employees currently need to travel some distance between their existing accommodation and the port. This combined housing option would also provide income to the port in two ways: through the sale of some of its land to a property developer and through rental charges for any port-owned housing.

Converting buildings into hostels or accommodation blocks may potentially be a lower cost option. This type of accommodation could be used to support a range of activities including: local scout and guide camps (providing space for tented camps or hostel facilities); providing accommodation for people attending outward bound type courses, for example hiking and orienteering around rural ports; or for groups undertaking sailing, canoeing and diving activities. The same facilities could also be used to accommodate students undertaking educational courses. Under this option, consideration would have to be given to provision of catering facilities, although catering could be provided by restaurant or cafe facilities developed for other visitors to the port such as tourists.

### Educational activities

Potential educational activities that could be developed by ports, or by local groups working with the port, may include examining the history of the region around the port, looking at its local ecology, local traditions, or even looking at the local cuisine of the region. Educational activities may include offering courses to groups from local schools or community groups. They may also include forging links with universities which offer courses in subjects that would be enhanced by working with a port.

With unused buildings comes the possibility of providing classroom space or even laboratory spaces. Students could spend time studying a range of courses looking at the local ecology and ecosystems, in marine or freshwater biology (dependent on location), in geography and environment, in local culture and history, or in photography and art, for example. Ports could also liaise with local heritage groups or experts in a specific field to come in and teach groups of school children. Forging links with universities and offering onsite facilities also has the potential benefit that students could conduct tests to monitor water quality or look at the biodiversity around the port, identifying how the port might minimise any environmental impacts or improve its environmental performance. Additionally, business and management students might undertake case studies into redevelopment opportunities available to the port.

### Cultural and heritage activities

Empty buildings may be more suitable for conversion into workshop and training spaces, for the development of local heritage museum spaces, or for gallery spaces and craft shops available to local

craftspeople. It is also possible to develop exhibitions of the local marine life, as in the example of The Deep, a large aquarium built near the marina in Hull in the UK.

There are a range of possibilities for the development of cultural and heritage activities depending on the buildings available, how much work is needed to convert them, and the history of the port and its environs. Where there is a strong local culture and heritage, some significant historical event, or even a specific architectural style locally, these can attract tourists to the area who will often purchase locally produced crafts as souvenirs or gifts. This has the further potential to benefit the local economy as those tourists will eat in local restaurants and may wish to stay in local hotels or bed and breakfast accommodation.

Linking in with the development of educational activities, there is also the possibility for local craftspeople to offer training courses, to host exhibitions featuring local culture and history, and to run special events such as craft fairs, historical re-enactment events, boating events or offer concert venues for local singers, for example.

### Tourism opportunities

If the port is able to redevelop some of its existing buildings to provide accommodation, there is the added potential that it could also be used for self-catering bases for holidaymakers during the main holiday periods and as student accommodation at other times. In this scenario, however, it is important to consider what tourist accommodation is already provided locally in order to avoid directly competing with local hoteliers or other businesses providing tourist accommodation.

This opportunity may be particularly suitable for smaller ports, close to tourist areas, where the scope for the development of additional tourist facilities is limited locally by, for example, a lack of suitable land or amenities. If a port did wish to investigate this option, it will need to identify the demographic groups that already visit and stay in the area (where and why they stay there, the main attractions in the area etc). Once this has been identified, they can consider marketing to attract different demographic groups and offering new reasons to visit the area. This links back to developing museum, gallery or craft shop spaces, providing craft workshops or training spaces. One option may be to offer accommodation packages on vessels moored in the port which can be used for evening cruises and dinners or for weddings or other party functions. Using

historic vessels or converting ships that previously operated in the port may be one way of providing such a package. There is also the potential to offer conference facilities and accommodation packages to businesses outside tourist season, or team building activities through outward bound type courses discussed previously.

### Summary

This article provides some suggestions on how ports might offer a diverse range of activities, change the use of empty or underutilised buildings, integrate community activities and strengthen community ties, and also potentially increase tourism within its area. There is, of course, scope for a range of other possibilities depending on the size, location and business activities of a specific port. There is also, quite clearly, a need to consider port security and protection of key port areas, when developing new activities around the port and its environs.

### References

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### About the author

Dr Angela Carpenter has been involved in research into how international and European Union policies impact on the activities of maritime ports and installations and on marine environmental protection. She has been conducting research for nearly 15 years and obtained her PhD in 2005. Recently she has been working on issues around security of maritime ports and harbours, and ship security.

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