

## Same but Different?

### Logistics Workers and Employment Conditions in the Mediterranean Port Cities of Naples and Marseille

**Andrea Bottalico** (Researcher, University of Naples Federico II, Italy) and **Enrica Morlicchio** (Full Professor, University of Naples Federico II, Italy)

In the last decades, the logistics revolution shaped the development of port cities. According to this paradigm shift, there should be no point, from production to final sale, when goods sit around waiting for further processing. The flow from sale to ordering to production to shipping and to the next sale should occur in one smooth motion. Circulation has become a part of the production process itself, whereas competition shifted from the firm level to the supply chain level (Allen, 1997; Bonacich and Wilson, 2008).

Rooted in ever changing and dynamic markets, ports started to witness a significant transition during the 1990s, developing in 'elements in the value-driven chain system' (Robinson, 2002). Many scholars have shared the idea that the technological revolution of the transportation has provided an essential support for the economic globalization (Levinson, 2006). Exploring the maritime nexus of globalisation, Kumar and Hoffmann (2010) observe that the declining cost of the international transport is one of the four cornerstones of the globalized economy.

In this process, port cities have played a crucial role. If the container embodies the constitutive revolution of the maritime-logistics chain, the reasons primarily concern the role of the intermodal transport as a glue between the various nodes of the production networks within which a transnational firm is broken down.

These new paradigms of global circulation and production influence labour processes and urban spaces for two main reasons. First, the emergence of a space of flows sanctions the end of the Taylor-Fordist organisation that sees the concentration of all activities in the factory. Second, the development of logistics chains fosters new infrastructures and *zones* with peculiar labour regimes, through which flows of goods pass. The Zone is the territorial organisational model that emerges from the growing proliferation of multiple territorial solutions to economic-trade objectives. Endowed with broad autonomy and free from the constraints of regulations, the Zone lends itself to be interpreted as a 'heterotopia' (Bach, 2011; Foucault, 1998).

Some scholars have been focusing on the interplay between city and port in the context of value chains (Hesse, 2010; Jacobs *et al.*, 2010; Garavaglia, 2017). However, studies that connect spatial and socioeconomic dynamics are missing, whereas port cities are a privileged observatory for understanding these mechanisms. Their characteristics reveal the network on which the production and distribution structures of the global economy rest.

Since port cities began to develop as nodes within global supply chains and production networks, this chapter argues that the spatial transformation of port cities and the employment conditions of the logistics workers involved in the handling of goods along the transport logistics chain are *more or less* the same everywhere. More or less, because these common changing dynamics that affect port cities and employment relationships have to deal with the historical legacies of each port city. This is even more clear when we consider the amphibious nature of the ports, both integrated in global productive networks and embedded in socio-institutional contexts with peculiar regulations. Ports in fact are rooted within specific institutional and spatial frameworks, closely linked to the past. After the logistics revolution, they are not only service facilities for ship and cargo, but integrators of a system, with distinctive socio-economic conditions, material, institutional, physical and structural constraints.

Notteboom and Rodrigue introduced the concept of 'port regionalisation' to emphasise the process of distribution decentralisation within a regional network, where efficiency derives from high levels of integration with inland transport distribution systems (2005). Studies on port spaces have undergone an epistemological shift in the conceptualisation of the port, from a single fixed spatial

entity to a network of terminals operating at different scales. In addition to the relationship between port and city, the literature has focused on the development of maritime or hinterland networks, looking at the entire maritime-logistics chain, port functions in the context of globalisation and the dissolution of port spaces, which remain on the one hand territorially rooted and on the other hand deterritorialised through the process of regionalisation (Ducruet & Lee, 2006).

The transformation process that has taken place in port cities in recent decades, after the logistics revolution, has also favoured the dissociation of the city from its port. Over time, all activities and operations for loading and unloading goods have been relocated away from the centre and from incoming tourists. In Marseilles (South of France), for instance, the industrial port developed sixty kilometres away from the city, towards Fos-sur-Mer. In the centre, the historical harbour basin has been prepared for cruise ships and passenger ferries from Corsica and Algeria to dock. At the same time, warehouses and sorting centres for the distribution of goods in the northern districts of the city have increased. Entire neighbourhoods close to the port spaces have completely changed their face. From this perspective, the variety of labour regimes and intermodal logistics spaces are intertwined. As neoliberal space technologies, ports are the mirror image of the cities to which they belong and from which they slowly dissociate, the reflection of what is manifested outside the port area and in the surrounding labour markets.

We show that the variety of port cities is influenced not only by the actors involved in the port segment, but also by the global economic actors operating along the entire logistics transport chain. The competition nowadays is in fact along the whole logistics network, which is generally formed by three dimensions more and more integrated, namely the maritime activities, the handling of goods in the port area, and the transport services in the hinterland (Meersman *et al.*, 2009).

Through the comparative analysis of the cases of the Mediterranean port cities of Naples (Italy) and Marseille-Fos (France), the chapter focuses on the interplay between spatial reconfigurations and labour conditions of logistics workers, reflecting more generally on the impact of global production networks and institutional constraints. For this comparative analysis, Gramsci's writings seem to us very helpful because of his conceptualization of the connection between Southern perspective, labour processes and workforce composition and his socio-historical frame, which opens to new perspective of analysis despite the countless (above all in Italy) attempts to mummify him in a mausoleum of orthodox thought.

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