

Small and Medium Sized Ports between Specialisation and Diversification: A Framework Tool for Sustainable Development

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Abstract : European ports are facing high political pressure through the implementation of initiatives such as the European Green Deal or IMO's 2030 targets (Fit for 55). However, small and medium-sized ports face even higher challenges compared to bigger ones due to lower capacities in various fields such as investments, infra-structure, Human Resources, and funding opportunities. Small and Medium-Sized Ports (SMPs) roles in economic systems are various depending on their specific functionality in maritime ecosystems. Depending on their different situations, being an actor in multiport gateways, aligned to core ports, regional nodes in peripheries for the hinterland, specialized cluster members, or logistical nodes, different strategic business models may be applied to increase SMPs' competitiveness among other bigger ports. Additionally, SMPs are facing more challenges for future development in terms of digital and green transition of their operations. Thus, it is necessary to evaluate the own strategical position and apply management strategies alongside the regional growth and innovation strategies for diversification or specialisation of own port businesses. The research uses inductive perspectives to set up a transferable framework based on case studies to be analysed. In line with particular research and document analysis, qualitative approaches were considered. The research is based on a deep literature review on SMPs as well as theories on diversification and specialisation. Existing theories from different fields are evaluated on their application for the port sector and these specific maritime actors, paying respect to enabling innovation incorporation to enhance digital and environmental transition with future perspectives for SMPs. The paper aims to provide a decision-making matrix for the strategic positioning of SMPs in Europe, including opportunities to get access to particular EU funds for future development alongside the Regional Innovation Strategies on Smart Specialisation.

Keywords : strategic planning, sustainability transition, competitiveness portfolio, EU green deal

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