
Editorial

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Biographical notes: Mary R. Brooks is Professor Emerita at Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada. She is the Editor of Elsevier's *Research in Transportation Business and Management* and Vice-Chair of the Marine Board of the Transportation Research Board of the U.S. National Academies of Sciences. She has authored and published more than 100 books, book chapters, and articles in peer-reviewed scholarly journals. She serves on seven journal boards. She is the founder and chair of the Port Performance Research Network, and a founding member of the International Association of Maritime Economists. Most of her research focuses on shipping and ports.

Stephen Pettit is a Reader in Cardiff Business School. He has been involved in a range of transport-related research including a study of the UK economy's requirements for people with seafaring experience, which highlighted important issues relating to the decline in the number of UK seafaring officers. He has also been involved in a number of research programmes for EU DGTREN including an 'Analysis of the cost structure of the main TEN ports'; and 'Work organisation in ports'. He has written many journal papers, conference papers and reports which relate to port development, port operations and port policy.

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In the current, highly dynamic and complex world of port management and global supply chains, frequent consideration must be given to a port's possible strategies in the context of the hinterland to or from which it draws its cargo. An examination of the linkage between ports and their hinterlands, trade and related intermodal transport activities are also an important consideration. The development of global supply chains has also increased the pressure on ports to improve their operations and strengthen their linkages with activities taking place in their hinterlands. Thus, as key nodes in the intermodal chain, ports must continuously take proactive actions to enhance their competitiveness while working closely with actors in the transport chain to meet today's trader demands.

In the context of the above, this special issue presents five papers developed further from work initially presented at the International Association of Maritime Economists annual conference in Norfolk Virginia in July of 2014. The conference was organised under the academic auspices of three North American universities pre-eminent in research in the fields of maritime transportation, and business education: Dalhousie University, Old Dominion University and Texas A&M University at Galveston. The overarching theme of the conference focused on 'maritime economics in a post-expansion Panama Canal era'. With the rapid increase in the size of vessels serving the main shipping routes, the implications for the maritime sector are significant for ports. Just as the Panama Canal Authority has moved to increase the capacity of the Panama Canal, so too must ports adapt to larger vessels, tighter schedules and turnaround times, and ever more demanding land-side customers. Effective links between the port and the hinterland are essential to providing effective shipping services. If ports are unable to provide high quality services to meet the demands of both the shipping lines and businesses operating within their hinterland then ultimately global trade will be impacted.

The papers presented in this issue represent a cross-section from the spectrum of research currently taking place in this area. Taken as a body of work they contribute to the discussion about the role of ports as important actors within global supply chains. A key aspect of the role of ports is that they add value to the supply chain by providing reliable and efficient services, safeguarding the flow of both goods to markets and raw materials to manufacturing regions.

Fundamental to the effective provision of port services is the link between the port and its hinterland. It is extremely difficult for a port to implement strategies that create value for its customers without close attention to the nature of its own hinterland and the peculiarities of the port's role in the trading relationships of its market. The first paper, entitled 'Analysis of the spatial development of the hinterland of ports: a case study' by Garcia-Alonzo et al., presents a case study of Spain and provides a detailed spatial analysis of the Spanish hinterland. While the paper draws conclusions about the Port of Valencia specifically, its main contribution is its demonstration of how to analyse a country's data for a port's import and export potential and the role played by various (possible) gateway ports. Furthermore, the approach can be used to take relevant data

(assuming availability) and assist a port manager in order to set up both inside and outside customer service support programmes as well as plan for future developments in its hinterland. Given this demonstration of data analysis potential, governments may be encouraged to think about the uses they make of the data they collect, or about changing their data collection activities.

The subsequent two papers deal with issues pertaining to the role of ports within specific regions. The first of these, by Yang et al., is entitled 'Port choice strategies for container carriers in China: a case study of the Bohai Bay Rim port cluster'. This paper presents an approach to examining port competition with a regional cluster in the Bohai Bay area of China. Although the number of ports studied is limited, it offers the opportunity to think of strategies from a government perspective where proximal location places the ports in direct competition with each other for cargo. The paper identifies that foreign trade routes and destinations, improved design capacity, demand from the hinterland, and whether or not there is a rapid boutique line, can sway a carrier's decision towards either a single port strategy or a multi-port strategy in the same cluster. The paper provides food for thought for governments considering governance regulation where there is such intra-cluster competition for lines and at the same time, a key gap remains for researchers to consider: while the authors identify the challenge of understanding shipping lines' choice of single versus multiport strategy, the missing element for further study is the impact of postage stamp pricing on that decision. As regional or postage stamp pricing is common in liner shipping, such future research need not be in the same geographic locale. We challenge authors interested in this topic to undertake this next step as well as to find whether these findings are similar in other parts of the world.

The next paper by Sakalayan et al. 'Investigating the strategies for Australian regional ports' involvement in regional development', explores relevant factors and strategic initiatives for the effective involvement of ports in regional development in an Australian context. The paper considers the role for ports in a wider regional context where they are seeking to develop their own business but also contribute to the economic growth of the region in which they operate, and the linkages which exist between the two. Based on a sample of port stakeholders, the paper considers the type of strategies ports might undertake as a contribution to regional development. A range of approaches are suggested including collaboration with partners to improve supply chain efficiency, collaboration with regional organisations to promote regional growth, being proactive and entrepreneurial within a regional innovation system, as well as being proactive both environmentally and socially. The paper suggests that collaboration between the port and the region can facilitate and support the development of both. Ultimately this may mean that there may have to be a different slant to port management tactics whereby long term planning, regional innovation, collaboration and the environment are considered in a more integrated fashion. It is also suggested that in support of this policy makers will have to provide support to allow ports flexibility to contribute to regional development initiatives.

The final two papers deal with the challenges that ports face in providing value for money service performance and do so in effective ways. The first by Schellinck and Brooks is entitled 'Does superior service performance provided to shipping lines improve the perceived value of a port?'. Although port authorities and port operators make efforts to add value for port users to enhance their satisfaction and loyalty, there is a lack of

empirical studies to examine the relationship between port service performance and perceived value. This study investigates this issue by using empirical data from seven North American ports provided by shipping line representatives. According to the results of exploratory principal components analysis, based on 17 service performance criteria, this study identifies four dimensions of port performance (i.e., vessel turnaround time, quality of hinterland services, port services quality, and terminal management competence). These four indicators provide a good source for researchers to examine port performance. Besides, the empirical findings of this study suggest that performance does not influence perceived cost of using the port but affects influence both value and value-added supplied by the port. The findings illustrate the importance of service performance on the perceived value of a port, and provide a good reference for port management.

Like the paper by Schellinck and Brooks, the paper entitled 'Multi-dimensional service improvement under the multi-customer nature of container terminals' by Huang et al. focuses on the challenge that ports face given the number of customer, user and stakeholder groups they serve. This paper has a slightly different description for the groups of concerns to ports but delivers a message about how the customer service elements of the port-stakeholder relationship may impact port strategies. The initial step in the research is based on secondary source data followed by expert interviews in Asia. If this paper is read in conjunction with the findings of the primary data examined in the Schellinck and Brooks paper, they complement each other and jointly focus on how terminal and port managers may think about port and terminal service quality. The former paper focuses on one of the sub-groups with primary data collected from container shipping lines serving North American ports, while this paper is sliced differently, in taking the broader perspective of stakeholders as its scope but narrows the scope to container terminal operations. The paper has an emphasis on operational performance, human resource management and IT issues in the delivery of customer service; while these can help a port create value for its customers, the question to be asked in the next round of research is whether these are drivers from a customer point of view. Researchers are encouraged to consider the expansion of this research to other geographies and beyond an expert opinion to the final users of container facilities. The paper provides good food for future research planning.

In summary the five papers presented here highlight the fact that port research is able to offer significant insights into both the overall environment in which ports have to operate as well as in the more detailed aspects of port operations. As a body of work the editors commend them to those interested in the role of ports in the modern globalised trading world and to the wider maritime community considering the role that ports play in serving trade interests.