

The firm and the sea: chains, flows and connections

Call for Papers, EBHA 2018 Conference
Università Politecnica delle Marche, Ancona – Italy
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The sea – whether considered as open ocean or as a mass of water bordered by land masses – is an enormous economic resource for mankind. Not only is it the principal way of transportation for goods and humans but it's also a formidable source of food. Since we want to link the sea with the business unit (the firm, as well as other organizational units like clusters, networks and global value chains) the focus of the next EBHA conference will be on two units of analysis that are both extremely relevant for the sea as well as economic resources – ships and harbors.

In order to perform its function, the ship (a means for transporting goods and people) is run in a very hierarchical way, more than what occurs with a factory or a retail company (two good comparison points). Just as with a factory or retailer, ships embody economic goals to be achieved by workers, managers, and – this is the difference – CEOs whose decisions cannot be challenged given that the cargo and (more importantly) the life of its “inhabitants” can be at stake.

Rarely does the ship stand on its own as a business unit (unless we talk of an activity like fishing which is certainly important). It's part of a group that refers to a shipowner acting in a very complicated world where the ups and downs of charters and continuous struggles with government regulations and policies render decisions delicate and complex.

The ship is the nexus of a tremendous amount of activity – just consider the shipyards, metallurgic factories, plants producing precision equipment, and those dedicated to heavy machinery. And think of other sectors like the extraction of raw materials and agricultural products that could have a real global circulation in relation to the capacity of the maritime vehicle.

Then there are associated service sectors such as insurance and banking activities focused on navigation (often with government support). Credit for navigation is a landmark of the modern economy with both successes as well as bankruptcies. Also worthy of further study is the role that passenger ships have played in the social and economic development of many nations. From the large ships of the late 19th and early 20th centuries that plied the Atlantic Ocean transporting passengers between the Americas and Europe to the postwar ocean liners that offered a glamorous way to travel to new destinations, ships helped make the tourism industry grow.

And we can't close our eyes to some of the unlawful activities connected with the world of navigation including the illegal transportation of human beings, prohibited goods, and money laundering. Even today there are occasional episodes of piracy, something that we thought limited to history books and old novels.

The second actor we consider is strictly related to the first one – ports, an unavoidable reference point for ships that make them their destination for the goods and passengers on board. It's in the port that a ship can stock materials needed when at sea and eventually undergo repairs before embarking on a new journey. We see the port as an

entrepreneur (formed by stakeholders with both common and divergent goals) which should be analyzed in an historical perspective. First are the many aspects of the governance of the port: who's in charge? Is it a function of the State or the military? Is it a managerially run port authority that, even if designated by State powers, has relative autonomy in its actions? Are there private operators who handle the terminals? How does the type of governance impact a port's efficiency? Second, we have to single out the crowd of operators in a port: maritime agents, stevedores, people who maneuver the cranes, pilots, dock workers. Several of these activities are strictly regulated, at times resulting in strong conflicts between various actors in the port.

The relationship between a port and the areas around it, the presence of appropriate infrastructures, and the many activities making up the field of logistics – all are tremendously important for the port as a kind of entrepreneur. Given their role of stimulating the trade of goods, raw materials and energy sources, the port becomes a key actor of the development of productive areas. Ports can strengthen or even launch the industrial take-off of the territories they supply. Moreover, ports are historically linked to global cities, nodes in a complex network of trade, but also of political international alliances, which emerged progressively in the phases of globalization (from Singapore to Hong Kong and from San Francisco to Yokohama, for example).

Even today seas and their ports remain a theater in which important geo-political and geo-economic stances take place; their relevance for business history can't be underestimated. From the building or restructuring of infrastructures that are pillars of the first wave of globalization (the Suez and Panama Canals, for example) to new opportunities brought about by the latest waves of globalization, the sea continues to be an essential, physical component of the complex web of trade relations which allow the existence of global value chains that take advantage of its unique means of connection and communication.

Last, but not least, ports, ships, and even the sea are highly sensitive to technological change and the resulting emergence of competitive and alternative infrastructures (from railways and motorways to airlines and large airport hubs).

Possible topics include (but are not limited to):

- Connections, links and networks in waves of globalization and de-globalization
- Characteristics and dynamics of the shipping and logistics industries
- The long run transformation of shipbuilding and related industries
- The fishing industry
- The history of insurance and banking activities related to navigation
- Technological developments and their impact on ships and ports
- The variety and features of illegal activities connected to sea transport
- Features and management of companies connected with the world of navigation
- Private and public entrepreneurship in sectors related to sea transportation
- Workers and industrial relations in maritime industries
- The governance of ports and their transformation over time
- Relations of cooperation/competition among maritime companies and ports
- The history and development of global value chains and networks

- The role played by firms and entrepreneurs in shaping the development of maritime exchanges of goods, services, and information, or in integrating economies and cultures
- Seas, ports and climate change
- Dynamics and impact of governmental policies and regulations on navigation
- The political economy of connections and links
- The impact of ports on their surrounding territory and vice versa
- The geography and features of global cities and their transformation
- The role of the sea in shaping the emergence and consolidation of different kinds of capitalism
- Migrations flows across the sea
- Passenger travel and the growth of tourism
- International investments in the maritime industries
- The relationships *among* port cities seen as nodes of a global network where dimensions and scope change over time

The organizers expect to receive proposals related to some of the suggestions outlined above. But consideration will also be given to papers covering other aspects of the broader conference title.

In the event of a business history topic without ties to the sea or the firm, consideration will be given, provided that the proposal demonstrates originality and that this forum could be a useful place for further reflection.

We also invite other formats, such as panels and roundtables, poster sessions for Ph.D. students, workshops aiming to start collaborative projects, and "toolkit sessions". Proposals should be directed to the paper committee as well.

Requirements for proposals

The submission system consists of a template that specifically asks for

(1) Author information: affiliation, short CV, authored publications related to the paper proposal

(2) An abstract of no more than 800 words

(3) Additional information important to the program committee: clear statement of the research question (not more than 150 words), brief information on the theoretical/conceptual framework used, major research areas to which the paper relates

(4) Joint papers need a responsible applicant who will be at the conference if the proposal is accepted.

Please have this information ready to enter into the submission system via copy and paste.

Requirements for panel proposals and roundtables

The criteria for single paper proposals also apply to session and roundtables proposals. There is, however, a specific template for session proposals.

Sessions can be ninety minutes long (usually three papers) or two hours in order to accommodate more papers. A successful panel/roundtable leaves significant time for the audience to raise questions, to comment and to generally discuss the panel's theme.

A session proposal should not be made up of participants exclusively from one country. The program committee retains the right to integrate papers into sessions as they see fit.

Please note that paper, session/panel proposals must be submitted via the congress website (use this link <http://ebha.org/public/C9> to upload proposals). See the Conference Website (<http://ebha18.univpm.it>) for further details.

The deadline is Wednesday, January 31, 2018.

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