# Ports in the Port: The Case of Messina

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**Abstract.** In seaside towns, the port has always constituted an essential element of their collective memory. From being the main cultural and identity element, this close port-city relationship has increasingly become a rich ecosystem that only lives with the cooperation of all its parts; ecosystems now more than ever called upon to face future challenges to ensure their sustainability, by creating green ports, from an environmental, economic and social point of view, using appropriate integrated approaches. The case of Messina will be analyzed. The area presents profiles of complexity that can make it a paradigm: the historic port is located in the city center and in it interacts commuter transport for the Calabrian side of the Strait serving workers in the areas, traffic on the Tyrrhenian -Ionian Seas axis and vice versa of pure transit, which in turn intersects with train, vehicle and passenger traffic on the Sicily-Calabria axis of non-commuting traffic. Finally, the port is affected by cruise tourism, the top 10 nationwide. Examining the interactions between these different traffic flows and 'destinations' with the immanent city that is totally integrated with it, may indicate a strategic model that can be adequately developed in larger port areas. And the imminent redevelopment projects of the former market areas with the I-Hub of the Straits and the Customs House for a new cruise terminal in one with the recovery of the *Real Cittadella* in the rear port will also imply a study of the bureaucratic interactions between different bodies.

**Keywords:** Port-city Interaction · Waterfront Redevelopment · Messina harbour

## 1 Introduction: Port Cities

In seaside towns, the port has always constituted an essential element of their ancestral and collective memory, becoming in almost all cases the main reference of urban identity itself.

A fundamental value not only at the time of their foundation, but also and above all, over time, for their spatial and productive organisation. The presence of the port is closely related to the historical and cultural memory of a place, to the point of marking it profoundly; it even becomes something with which the inhabitants who live in and pass through it, come to identify themselves, acquiring it and restoring a sense of it even through its very architecture.

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The architectural configuration of the main port cities has always stemmed from the profound relationship with the port itself, a fundamental element of exchange between the land and the sea, between the stable space and the constantly changing one. And this has historically been the case since the ancient Greek or Roman settlements, to the ancient mediaeval walls, to the Renaissance openings, to the most modern architectural and spatial solutions of the waterfront.

The permanent dialectic between land and sea is certainly the main feature in port cities.

Port cities never imagine themselves to be stationary, but always historically hospitable and on the move, always ready for continuous arrivals and departures, for goodbyes and new welcomes. It is no coincidence that their growth has always been related to that of the port, just as their crisis, historically, has also coincided with the crisis of the port itself, with the weakening of trade or exchange and/or with changes in flows. Cities and their ports are linked by important, but often conflicting relationships, which have inevitably conditioned their mutual evolutions [2, 9].

In fact, when in many of these seaside cities, the port as a pole of economic development disappeared, and this happened especially in the last decades of the 20th century, with the crisis of maritime transport and heavy industry, the port cities that were unable to cope with the changes coming from the sea entered more into crisis; they did not reinvent themselves on the sea and port front and, closing in on themselves, they almost completely turned their backs on the sea. A strategic error when one considers that this is, after all, their primary source of wealth. But in this way the overwhelming opportunity and wealth of the cities themselves ended up becoming a deep barrier rather than an opportunity. And this has happened because they have lost contact with their raison d'être, their sea, and thus interrupted a centuries-old relationship, which, after all as in all relationships that work, is changeable and must be nurtured and regained.

The focus on port areas, often suddenly freed in central and desirable locations, has forced us to contemplate the different potentials of these areas, which have once again been discovered and thus reinvented and converted to urban uses and functions. Cities such as Marseille, Barcelona, Rotterdam, Hamburg, Malaga, Boston, Yokoama, but also Bilbao, on its *Rìa*, have resurrected precisely by recovering their historical port spaces with a profound intervention of recovery of their respective waterfronts and the reconversion and redevelopment of their sea or river ports [5–8] (Fig. 1).

Port cities must consider the richness of the stretch of water in front of them as a determining factor when making important architectural, planning and urban regeneration choices; and they must take it into primary consideration when the need to reinvent themselves and decide on the new face of the city cyclically arrives.

A new face, that of the port waterfront, which involves subjects from different sectors and among them urban planners and designers, politicians and, often, countless other decision-makers or stakeholders.



**Fig. 1.** Examples of waterfront projects in some city-ports in Europe: Bilbao, Hamburg, Tokyo, Barcelona. Photos by Clara Stella Vicari Aversa.

Indeed, port waterfront areas are often privileged spaces that lend themselves to hosting various functions and no longer those purely related to industry alone, as was the case in the past. Their location makes these areas truly attractive areas close to urban or historical centres; historic city ports, in particular, are ideal places to host activities related to transport, trade, entertainment and, of course, tourism. They can be ideal places to build new housing developments, hotels, recreational areas, sports facilities, and thus become important sources of employment.

These waterfronts along the harbour, which then spread along the waterfront of the cities in which they are located, not only provide breathing space for residents, but also ample space for monuments, housing, recreation and mixed-use developments.

This is certainly an interdisciplinary issue that is becoming an increasingly popular and shared topic in the fields of urban planning, city architecture and should increasingly be integrated as a priority within any development policy process [3, 4, 19].

From being the main cultural and identity element, this close port-city relationship has become an increasingly complex sphere, a rich ecosystem that only lives with the cooperation of all its parts; ecosystems now more than ever called upon to face the present and future challenges regarding the actions necessary to ensure their sustainability [15]. Even the necessary and increasingly urgent focus on issues such as sustainability, urban regeneration, and the need for ever greener spaces and ports, ineluctably tends towards a global social and economic model that works the more it tends to involve all players in the process. It is a matter of getting architects, engineers, town planners, and landscape architects to work together with the political authorities and administrative bodies involved from time to time, all united, it is hoped, by the need to find answers to a new, closer and more contemporary relationship between port and city. Moreover, if we consider that 90% of ports in Europe are located in urban areas, it is clear that their development must necessarily be governed by environmental protection logics and policies. In fact, ports are actually responsible for a substantial share of greenhouse gas

emissions, which are certainly harmful both for those who live near these places and for the ecosystem.

Port cities, in these processes of evolution, are also called upon to regenerate by making their ports increasingly green ports. A formula that must be understood from an environmental, economic and social point of view, using appropriate integrated approaches and electrification and decarbonisation interventions, involving the port itself but also the post-port areas intimately connected to it.

The port of Messina, if the ongoing transformation processes are completed, will be able to contribute to the reshaping of port cities; its port and its old new architecture have in fact and in power a dual energy: economic for the territory's gross domestic product, regenerative as a lever for the urban re-modelling of the entire city area.

Administrative and political authorities interacting in the governance of the territory, planners, but also entrepreneurs in port areas could draw indications and references in the performance of their roles or in the protection of their interests.

A necessarily basic technical and historical framing of the Messina port city, of its hybrid character, will be followed by an examination of current or possible projects and processes, all aimed at putting the pieces of the puzzle that make up the identity of a city back in the right place.

## 2 The Port City of Messina, Its Sickle

Of all the port cities that have begun to undertake these necessary transformations, the case of the city of Messina, historically the 'Gateway to Sicily' from the Italian peninsula, located on the Strait of the same name between Sicily and Calabria, is analysed. The city's original name, 'Zancle', coincides precisely with the conformation of its port. A name given to it by the Siculians, who called it 'Zanklon', due to the configuration of the harbour with the appearance of a sickle, a harbour that still identifies the image of the centre of the city itself. Even the most historically representative and characteristic architectural invention of the city, the *Palazzata*, is none other than the redesign with architecture of the harbour front. The *Palazzata* that exists today, designed by Giuseppe Samonà in the 1930s, still seems to embrace the harbour; a comparison of non-maritime architecture could be the typical Spanish Plaza Mayor (Fig. 2).

The city of Messina, lying longitudinally on a narrow plain between the Peloritani Mountains and the junction of the Tyrrhenian and Ionian Seas, seen from the sea with its *Palazzata* in the foreground, presents several elements of variety and complexity, which derive above all from its particular geographical position and configuration. Messina, in fact, in its characteristic position of 'control' of the Strait of the same name, seems far from representing the 'classic and normal' maritime city, where land and sea, located opposite each other, meet and control each other along a 'simple' edge. The city, on the contrary, is an incredible and almost inextricable crossroads of land and sea but also of exchange between one land and another land that is, in turn, a continent.

"On a map of the world, the Mediterranean is nothing more than a fissure in the earth's crust… These mountains reach out to the sea, sometimes choking to the point of reducing it to a mere corridor of salt water: think… of the Strait of Messina with the swirling eddies of Scylla and Charybdis… It is no longer sea: they are rivers, or even




**Fig. 2.** Messina in a map attributed to the Turkish admiral Piri Reis, circa 1554. Messina in an engraving from 1783 [20]. The Strait and the Port of Messina. Source Geoportale Messina, www.comune.messina.sitr.it - AdSP, https://cpwaterfrontmessina.it.

mere sea gates" writes Fernand Braudel. And the same French historian adds that this liquid space is almost no longer sea, but river, because of the way Sicily and Calabria seem to restrict it.

Messina, as written above, gateway to Sicily, has also been called the 'key to Sicily', due to its strategic geographic location but also due to its natural military and commercial port, a point of union between the Italian peninsula and the East and traditionally one of the most welcoming in the Mediterranean. It is no coincidence that it is a frequent feature in many ancient engravings, especially those of Grand Tour travellers, and a magnificent backdrop in some famous paintings such as Antonello da Messina's Sibiu Crucifixion; but, even before that, a place recounted in Homeric mythology. The city has grown longitudinally around its port since antiquity; it has been a transit route of great importance, attracting enterprising spirits of various nationalities because of the extraordinary beauty of its landscape and the charm of its waters, full of deceptive whirlpools, myths and legends, of monsters with magical powers such as Scylla and Charybdis, 'so distant in nature' -they are separated by three kilometres- 'and which poetry, nevertheless, has located so close', said Goethe; and, finally, never ceasing to produce suggestions even in more recent times, inspiring a wonderful marine poem, Stefano D'Arrigo's Horcinus Orca.

Messina's entire history is linked to its port, living and developing both in a natural symbiosis, passing from the splendour of the 17th century, to the crisis of the 18th

century, to the revival years of the 19th century, to the painful post-earthquake years and the gradual decline.

A port and a city profoundly changed between the 19th and 20th centuries.

In the 19th century, the first steamers stopped next to the sailing ships, the quays were full of goods with stretches of barrels ready to be loaded and huge ox-drawn carts shuttled from the factories to the port, especially for citrus products. In the 20th century, the expanse of goods on the quays was replaced by a multitude of men and women leaving for the Americas. At the same time, after the disastrous earthquake of 1908, there was also the slow and more modern reconstruction of the port facilities, with the large cranes on a par with the increasingly large ships, now all made of steel. Throughout the various epochs, the port has never ceased to be the lung and heart of Messina's economic and social reality, while remaining at the centre of the city's life (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3.** Current view of Messina from its harbour. Photo by Clara Stella Vicari Aversa.

## 3 An Inextricable Intertwining of Routes

The special feature of the 'urban' port of Messina is a continuous and inextricable intertwining of routes. There are fast and slow routes, traffic of light vehicles, such as cars, and heavy vehicles, such as trucks; flows of people and goods between one bank and the other and parallel to the city, across the Strait from north to south and vice versa. Small vessels, container ships, ships with trains in them and cruise ships travelling between Sicily and Calabria or transiting the Strait enter or leave the port. There is an unusual overlapping and multiplication of routes, of straight lines, of roads and railway lines interrupted at sea but then resumed on the two shores.

Not only is the Strait traversed seamlessly, 24 h a day, every day of the year, by ships laden with passengers, cars, trucks and even trains connecting the two shores; but oceanic routes also cross on these, with container ships that may come from China, cross Suez and head, if they are lucky, for Gioia Tauro, but sometimes continue on to Rotterdam and into the North Seas [18]. And there is no shortage, of course, and indeed they are constantly increasing, of the gigantic mobile palaces of the sea, the cruise ships.

The port itself of the city of Messina, the historic sickle of the harbour, a decisive junction and strategic crossroads, has evolved for these reasons.

The traditional port of Messina, born and bred as a so-called 'port emporium', with reference to the classification of ports into generations according to their characteristics, is a first-generation port [22]. However, processes are underway to overcome the functioning of the port as an 'independent realm' in which the operators within it often act like atoms. And this also emerges from what is described in this paper.

Today, it is no longer a single port; there are many ports in a port, many ports and berths even intertwined with each other. And in its most intimate and sheltered part, bordering on the remains of the *Real Cittadella* created by Charles V, activities serving the sea such as shipbuilding and those of the Navy.

The historic sickle of the port of Messina, in fact, despite its fairly contained dimensions, actually seems to house a world.




**Fig. 4.** Cruise ship in the port of Messina in front of the *Palazzata.* Source Port System Authority of the Strait [1]

Right in front of the historical buildings of the *Palazzata*, which redesign the edge of the harbour, cruise ships are arranged every week; they almost seem to be playing doubles and competing in height, and eventually winning, with the *Palazzata* itself (Fig. 4).

Almost at the end of the *Palazzata*, in the area comprised between the old Customs House and the Maritime Station, dock the so-called fast ships, replacing the hydrofoils invented in the 'Rodriquez' shipyards years ago in Messina itself, reserved for passengers, in communication with Reggio Calabria (with connections to the city centre or to the Straits Airport), Villa San Giovanni and the Aeolian islands.

In front of the Maritime Station dock the ships of the State Railways, connecting with both Reggio Calabria and Villa San Giovanni, including special ships equipped with tracks to carry all trains to and from the 'continent'; ships carrying cars, trucks and passengers.

Ships carrying cars, trucks and passengers to and from Salerno also dock daily at the port.

And, as mentioned above, cruise ships, to the great satisfaction of the Port System Authority of the Strait, whose President Mega recently declared: "A great cruise season

is on the horizon for the Port of Messina with the arrival of the most beautiful and modern ships that ply the seas all over the world"; the same President underlined that the city port, in April 2023, is confirmed to be of great attractiveness for ship-owners from all over the world, with well-established approval rates; 25 companies will be present, from MSC with 39 stopovers to Norwegian Cruise Line with 24, from Royal Caribbean with 38 ships of the RCCL/Celebrity brand to Viking with 21 calls and many more, also expecting welcome returns such as Carnival and Costa Crociere.

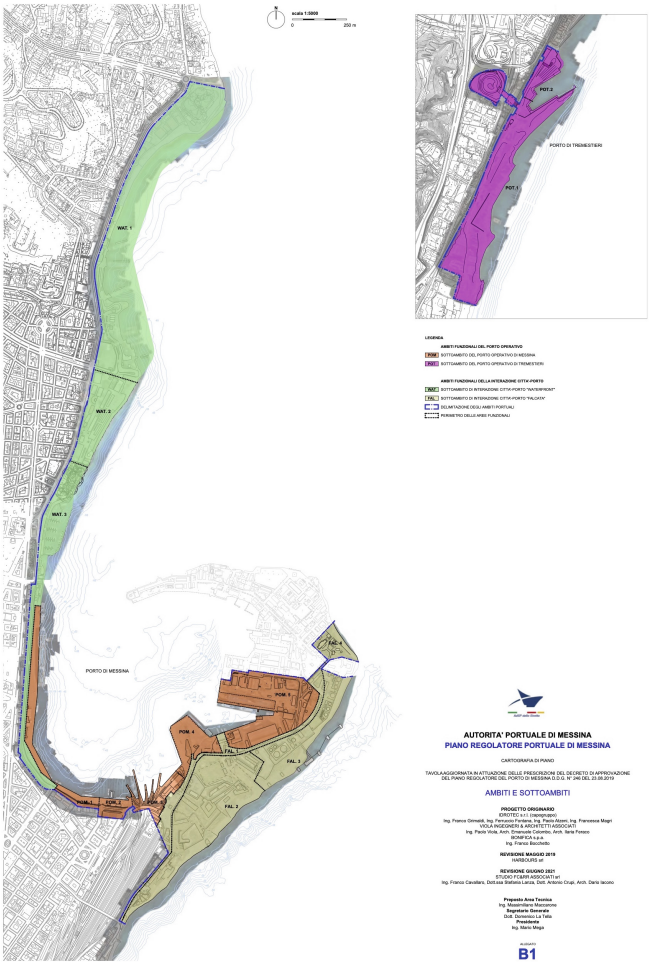


**Fig. 5.** Port Master Plan. Port System Authority of the Strait. Areas and sub-areas [1]

The area included in the historic port is not the only one with berths, there are others further north and further south that fall under the jurisdiction of the Port System Authority of the Strait. This is an entity established in 2016, with legal personality under public law and endowed with budgetary and financial autonomy, whose main

tasks are those of direction, planning, control, coordination, and promotion of port operations and other commercial and industrial activities carried out in the ports of Messina, Tremestieri, Milazzo, Villa San Giovanni, Reggio Calabria, and Saline in an administrative-managerial unicum, thus unifying the development strategies of the port infrastructures of the entire Strait of Messina area [1] (Fig. 5).

Just outside the harbour crescent, a little further north, in front of the Prefecture and the *Passeggiata a Mare* and just before the entrance to the former trade fair citadel, there is a small marina; a short distance away, after passing the trade fair enclosure, in the roadstead of San Francesco di Paola, there has been a berth for private Caronte-Tourist ships since the 1970s. Ships that, like a modern two-faced Janus, load cars and passengers and, whenever the port of Tremestieri is silted up due to storm surges, even trucks, relentlessly linking the Sicilian shore with the Calabrian shore at Villa San Giovanni.

In the southernmost area, about 8 km from the city centre, is the port of Tremestieri, which has recently become an area of strong commercial development. From here, with the entry into operation of the maritime port, a high percentage of the heavy ferry traffic to and from Calabria is handled, shifting here much of the traffic that used to be carried out at the FS embarkation points of the Maritime Station and the San Francesco di Paola roadstead (Fig. 6).



**Fig. 6.** Some of the ships that cross in the Strait of Messina: FS train-carrying ship, cruise ship near the Maritime Station, Caronte & Tourist car carrier, container ship. First photo by Roberto Di Maria, others photos by Clara Stella Vicari Aversa.

The area of the Strait of Messina therefore presents profiles of complexity that can make it a paradigm: the historic port is located in the historic and current centre of the city; commuter transport for the Calabrian side of the Strait interacts in it, serving workers in the two areas, traffic on the Tyrrhenian-Mar Ionian axis and vice versa of pure transit,

which in turn intersects with rail, vehicle and passenger traffic on the Sicily-Calabria axis of non-commuter traffic. Finally, the port is affected by cruise tourism, which places the city among the top 10 nationwide.

It is no coincidence that, on the basis of the *Ispra - Istituto Superiore per la Protezione e la Ricerca Ambientale* surveys, the city of Messina is in the top position for the indicator measuring the size of ports according to the number of passengers transported each year. *Ispra* measures the relevance of European ports by means of two indicators, cargo transit capacity, as a volume of containers, and passenger traffic on arrival and departure [10].

Moreover, according to these findings of the said body, by number of passengers transported each year, the two cities on the Strait, Messina and Reggio Calabria, in just three years, from 2016 to 2019, have even doubled the number of people transported, with a remarkable growth of 90% and 95% respectively.

Messina ranks first, and its neighbour Reggio Calabria fourth, as the main European ports for passenger transport, with 11.7 and 10.9 million passengers transported each year, respectively. An achievement that while on the one hand is a richness and a surprise considering the size of the cities and their inhabitants, on the other hand also opens up an issue and a sore point to be addressed, that of the environment.

It is clear that it is becoming fundamental that the normal process of logistical and economic development of the city, and the inevitable use of the sea as a means of communication and transport, is increasingly accompanied by the need not only to protect the environment of the port areas and those connected to them, but also to minimise the environmental impact of the port infrastructures themselves on the surrounding territory (Fig. 7).

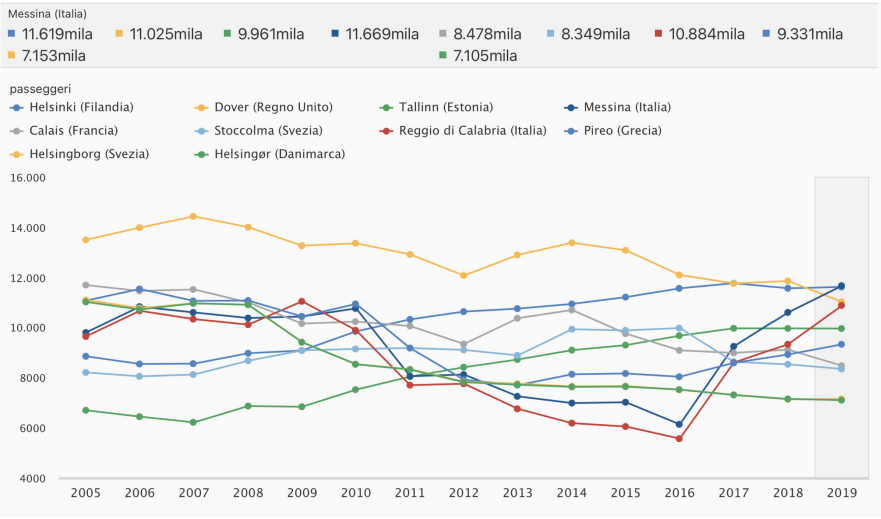


**Fig. 7.** The main ports in Europe by number of passengers transported each year (2005–2019). Source *Openpolis* processing of *Ispra* data (updated 2 March 2022) [17]

Italy, moreover, is first in Europe for emissions at berth, according to Transport Environment data. [21] (Fig. 8).

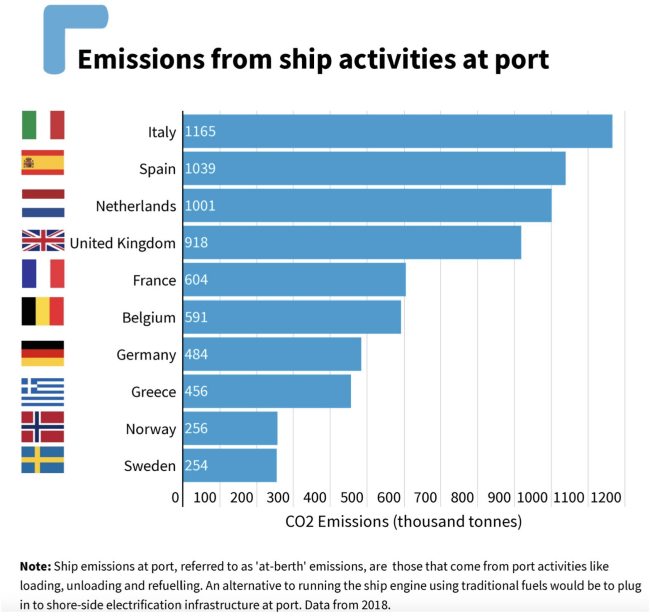


**Fig. 8.** Emissions from ship activities at port by Member State. Source *TransportEnvironment.*

## 4 Green Transition and More

The Messina port, considered, due to its natural strategic position, one of the safest natural harbours in the Mediterranean, if not subject to intervention, risks also becoming one of the most polluted.

One can therefore understand how important it is to intervene urgently and carefully on the area surrounding the port area, but also the strategic role that urban, architectural and technological planning and regeneration of these areas can play. The potential benefits and possible interrelations and uses for the community are enormous. Without forgetting that here, as in other seaside cities, a wide variety of entities and interests are involved and only with dialogue, understanding between all stakeholders and joint planning is it possible to think of contributing to the success of a waterfront redevelopment project. The public entities involved in the management of the areas are, among others, the aforementioned Port Authority, the Municipality of Messina, the Superintendence for Cultural and Environmental Heritage, the Civil Engineers, the Port Authority; and, again, the State Property Agency and the Navy. Interacting with decisions on the area are the companies of the *Ferrovie dello Stato* group, the local Chamber of Commerce (Fig. 9).



GOVERNMENT

National Government
Regional Government
Local Government
Port Authorities
Park Authorities
Planners
Development Review Panels

PUBLIC

Existing Residents
New Residents
Conservationists
General Public
Recreational Associations
Nature Associations
Yachting Associations
Educational Institutions

PRIVATE

Shop Owners
Investors
Land Owners
Developers
Surrounding Land Owners
Farmers
Heavy Industry

SERVICES & OPERATIONS

Waterway Operators
Marina Operators
Waterfront Planners
Waterfront Designers
Waterfront Engineers
Architects
Landscape Architects
Suppliers
Construction

**Fig. 9.** Stakeholders in waterfront development. Source *Waterfronts NL* [23]

In this complex framework of relations between different subjects, the Port Authority of the Strait has a number of interventions underway, as also shown in the AdSP Straits Sustainability Report. With regard to pollution, thanks to an intervention financed under the National Plan Complementary to the PNRR, it has launched the tender for the final and executive design and implementation of works for the electrification of port quays. The interventions aim at a new green transformation foresee the electrification of all the quays of the historical port, from which cruise ships will also be powered, with a total power of about 22 MVA; they already foresee the possibility of a further increase. The characteristics of the port of Messina located within the city and the particular type of traffic present also make the implementation of an On-Shore Power Supply system to electrically power the docked ships highly advisable. This will allow the engines to be switched off and the consequent significant reduction of emissions and air pollutants, including particulates and nitrogen oxides, in the port areas [1].

While electrification is important, it can certainly contribute, but on its own it is not enough to address the port climate problem. Indeed, the enormous energy requirements of individual vessels make electrification of ships for movement at sea unlikely, and so there is a clear need to track down the possible clean liquid fuels of the future.

The only fuels to be proposed as sustainable and scalable for the maritime sector do not seem to be fossil liquid natural gas (LNG) and biofuels, even though they are erroneously proposed as sustainable options, but rather those produced from renewable energy and, where appropriate, direct air capture. This refers to so-called hydrogen-based 'e-fuels', such as e-ammonia, e-methanol or hydrogen itself. Unfortunately, however, the current proposals require the former and not the latter. At the moment, therefore, ports do not invest in clean fuel infrastructure until they are sure that ship owners will demand it, and ship owners refrain from investing in zero-emission ships until there is a clear supply infrastructure for clean fuels.

The climate package with proposals for '*Fit for 55'* transport, adopted by the European Commission on 14 July 2022, which contains legislative proposals to achieve the *Green Deal* targets by 2030, is undoubtedly the most important legislative package in history for shipping. The goal is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 55 per cent

compared to 1990 levels and with the prospect of achieving 'carbon neutrality' by 2050, the package represents an important opportunity to equip European shipping with an environmentally friendly refuelling and charging infrastructure that will finally address its climate impact [12].

Port authorities and representatives of the European Parliament and the EU Council must support ambitious targets for clean port infrastructure to ensure the green transition of maritime transport.

The Green Transition can also be achieved in other ways and, above all, by reducing the causes to limit the consequences and, in the case of Messina, a big step forward can also be taken by intervening in infrastructure, logistics, and alternative connections, such as the Strait of Messina Bridge, which would greatly reduce polluting emissions due to the routes of ships laden with vehicles between the two shores (Fig. 10).



**Fig. 10.** Bridge over the Strait of Messina. Project. Source *Webuild S.p.A. – Webuild Group* [24]

The bridge project, moreover, plans to compensate, with large green spaces and parks, the areas on which it rises and those closest to them. And the city of Messina is in great need of green spaces. In fact, according to a study published by *Openpolis*, while Trieste is the metropolitan city capital with the greatest availability of urban green space (62.4 square metres per inhabitant), followed by Venice (43.6 square metres/inhabitant) and Reggio di Calabria (37 square metres/inhabitant), unfortunately Messina is in last place, together with Bari, with extensions of less than 10 square metres/inhabitant [16].

What if the Bridge over the Strait of Messina finally exists and comes true? According to a study conducted by engineers Giovanni Mollica and Nino Musca, of the 'Civic Network for Infrastructure in Southern Italy', the reduction in pollution levels would be drastic: carbon dioxide or carbon dioxide emissions would fall by 94%, carbon monoxide emissions by 73%, nitrogen oxides and sulphur oxides would be cut by almost 100%) and particulate matter would fall by over 80%, in addition to the predictable reduction of THC, total hydrocarbons, by almost 80% [11].

Green transition is also achieved by intervening, with appropriate redesign and careful architectural reconfiguration, in the public spaces and buildings along the maritime edge of the port in a greener and more conscious manner. It means intervening to give back

a face, but also a character to the finally regenerated edge, recovering its characteristics, with a targeted and responsible project.

There are some ways, from a design point of view, to encourage this transition and the sustainability of places, starting above all by giving them meaning:

- spaces and architecture in the harbour should be places to accommodate as many useful activities for all as possible;
- there is a need to give awareness and trust to physical places also in the sense of sustainability;
- a search for a balanced relationship between each piece of architecture and the surrounding landscape is necessary;
- there is also a need to rediscover a poetic dimension of design, something that appears as that added value capable of making architecture truly more sustainable.

It is no coincidence that, over time, the major architects and town planners who have worked on the Strait area have not resisted including the port as a founding project of urban redevelopment. Suffice it to think of the new vision of the cities of the Strait with the sea and the port of Messina at the centre, drawn up for the International Ideas Competition for a stable road-rail link between Sicily and the continent, by Giuseppe and Alberto Samonà with the *Gruppo urbanisti architetti siciliani* in 1969, which can probably be considered the paradigm of urban plans for the Strait Area.

The project even envisages a doubling of the historic port with the *Biporto*, a strategic element that coincides with the new land and sea route welded by the road and rail bridge. As Prof. Franco Cardullo well emphasises, these are "visions or ideas such as those of the 'Biport', or the 'City-region' or the 'Future Metropolis of the Strait', all developed in continuity and homogeneity, which relate economic planning, with urban, territorial and landscape design, but always with an architectural capacity, to think physically about forms that reinterpret and enhance the physical environment, projecting it into a future: a future that has been denied" [6] (Fig. 11).

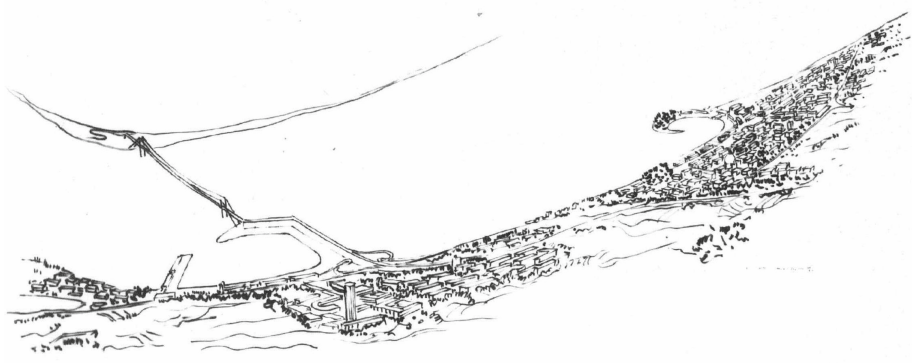

**Fig. 11.** Competition for the PRG of Messina, motto 'Biporto', 1960, with the *Gruppo urbanisti architetti siciliani*: Antonio Buonafede, Roberto Calandra, Napoleone Cutrufelli, Giuseppe De Cola and Alberto Samonà [7]

## 5 The Historic Port, the Back Harbour, the *Real Cittadella*, the Areas of the Disused Markets and the Reuse of Existing Architecture

The recovery and regeneration of the historic port and its surrounding areas therefore becomes an urgent measure for a city of the sea such as Messina; and the above-mentioned multifaceted character of the port itself, 'the ports in the port' allows us to state that the model of recovery of Messina's historic port can represent a model for other historic ports in the city centre. With the necessary adaptations deriving from the diversity of geographical dimensions and the presence of all or, more likely, some of the destinations of the port of Messina, other cities and other ports may find indications for development.

The imminent redevelopment projects of the former market areas near the port with the creation of an innovation hub, the *I-Hub dello Stretto*, the reuse of the Customs House areas, once the Royal Palace, for a new cruise terminal together with the recovery of the *Real Cittadella* in the hinterland are some of the pieces of a mosaic to be put together in terms of architectural design and to be added to the green transition of the more specifically port infrastructure. The challenge is not the feasibility of the works but the capacity for dialogue and cooperation between the aforementioned interested bodies that have decision-making power over the future of the areas [14]. The study of the bureaucratic interactions between the various public, local, national and European bodies in order to reduce decision-making deadlocks to zero has the same importance as the complexity of choosing the 'scale' of architecture to be built or demolished or reused and the sources of funding to be found.

Three are, symbolically, the concentric circles on the historic port: the green transition of the port infrastructure, the reuse of architectures of historical importance and new construction of disused areas in the city centre close to and bordering the historic port, the rediscovery and reclamation to make it a living part of the city of the *Real Cittadella* located on the Sickle itself. The first two circles are already 'designed' and underway, the third is still at the planning stage and, perhaps, as will soon be said, it is precisely from the historic port that the favourable wave to restore lustre to the 1600s jewel can start.

The area of the Technological Innovation Pole will be comprised of the buildings between the two Stations, the Central and Maritime, and the Customs House area already occupied by the Royal Palace. It is planned to demolish the buildings that housed the *Magazzini Generali*, the old *Silos Granai* and the Fish Market building to allow, using the same site and footprint but with a different volume, the construction of the Innovation Hub of the Strait.

The Technology and Innovation Hub is expected to attract investment from international companies and, at the same time, will serve to redevelop the real estate of one of the most valuable portions of the city's territory.

The bet is that the SEZ area - *Special Economic Zone* - where the I-Hub will be located will be able to attract multinationals in the high value-added technology sector that will be able to set up in their factories with the constraint of hiring human resources and incubating the most promising start-ups. And the integration and interaction with the port and its role as a connector should enhance the results.

In this context of architectural and urban renaissance, on the side of the redesigning of this part of the city port, between the sea and the city centre, there remains the unknown aspect of the project for a modern cruise terminal on one of the cruise ship docks, between the *Palazzata* and the sea. The contract has been halted and, to date, it is unclear what will happen in the future. A reflection on sea-land, *Palazzata*-Port, full-empty interactions should, in the writer's opinion, lead to the project being abandoned. Messina and its port do not need to add but to subtract cement or, at the very least, to conserve and enhance what exists.

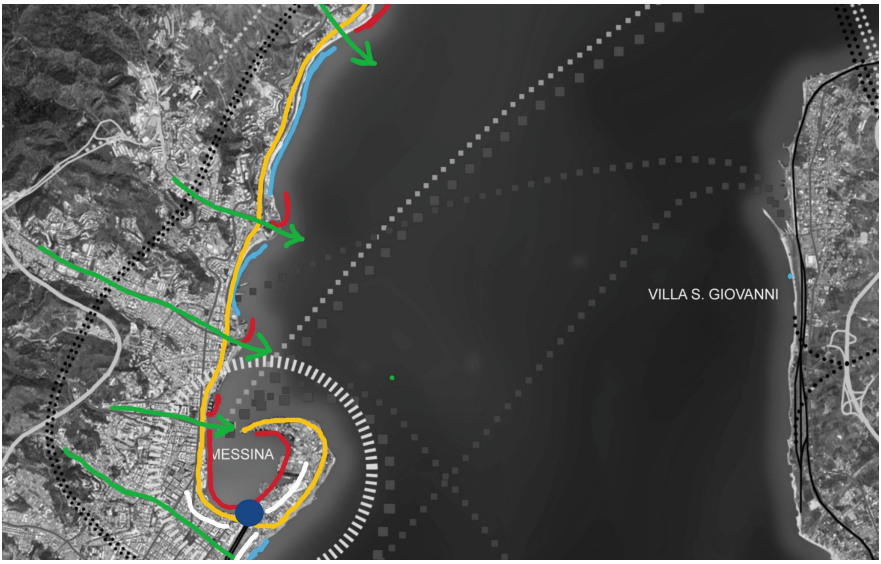


**Fig. 12.** Outline drawn up on behalf of the Order of Architects of Messina for the Waterfront Boccetta public debate requested by the Port Authority of the Strait of Messina [13]

And in this perspective, the new starting point should be represented by the functional recovery of Angelo Mazzoni's Maritime Station, seen as a hinge capable of connecting the Messina of the *Real Cittadella* and the Sickle, to the Messina of the new *Palazzata*, the Exhibition Citadel, the *MuMe* Museum and the beach leading to Capo Peloro. A hub to be placed, in addition and not as an alternative to the above-mentioned spaces of the Customs House, which can also be used by cruise tourism. A point of convergence of immediately usable attractions and new activities to be launched in the medium-short term, also in view of the redevelopment, already underway, at last even if still only partially, of the southern area's seafront. A new cruise terminal in the Maritime Station, to which other activities are also aggregated, could become, in this way, a central and driving element, due to its position but also to its being a reconversion, a harmonious use, of a pre-existing building. The piers of the maritime station themselves, arranged almost like an open hand towards the sea, seem to constitute an interesting invitation to enter the island, even if not the only possibility of docking and arriving from the sea in a city with a sea front of some 20 kms (Fig. 12).

The symbolic value of such an intervention is evident. In terms of location and conformation, the spaces and areas of the refunctioned Maritime Station in the heart of the port would allow those arriving from the sea to immediately see and get to know the city itself: the remains of the historic city, right behind, in the Spanish Royal Citadel, up to embrace its splendid seafront, the historical and vital core of Messina's *Palazzata* turning their gaze. One would welcome cruise passengers to the city by making them pass through significant architecture. It would act in line with a building policy that tends to prevent an increase in cubic capacity on the territory and favours the reuse of the existing.

With a ripple effect, it was written, the new function of the Maritime Station could accelerate the rebirth of the *Real Cittadella*, located inside the sickle between the two portions of sea separated by it. This is a fortress, the ruins of which remain, built as an imposing military construction with a star-shaped plan and five bastions, between the late 17th and early 18th century by the Spanish, with the dual task of defending and controlling the Strait and the hills above it, and which could also become a defensive stronghold. It is a fine example of military architecture now owned by the Sicilian Region, as a property bound by the Superintendence and falling under the Maritime State Property managed by the Straits Port Authority, which deserves the redevelopment and restoration work that has fortunately just begun.

The interaction between historic port - city centre - disused industrial areas (such is what the sickle has become over time) is clearly underway. The pieces of the mosaic if they find their place with the completion of the work will give Messina, its ports in the harbour in step with the environmental challenges, in dialogue with the economic activities of the city that has among its main streets the road parallel to the docks and capable of stimulating the historical and architectural recovery of the sickle. The port returns to being the vital centre of the city capable of reuniting and revitalising, through the sea, the land on which Messina stands by integrating the sickle into the *Palazzata* (Fig. 13).

Messina is splendid but, too often resigned, lacks courage and ambition. Will it be good enough this time to savour the new changes that come with its being a city by the sea, Bridge over the Strait of Messina included? Will it be able to bet on its new image revolutionised starting from the very heart of the city, making peace with its port and reaffirming its sea front?

Italo Calvino wrote in '*The Invisible Cities*' about one of his cities, Zenobia, which is all cities, "*It is useless to establish whether… it should be classified among the happy cities or among the unhappy ones. It is not into these two species that it makes sense to divide the city, but into two others: those that continue through the years and mutations to give their shape to desires and those in which desires succeed in erasing cities or are erased from them*".

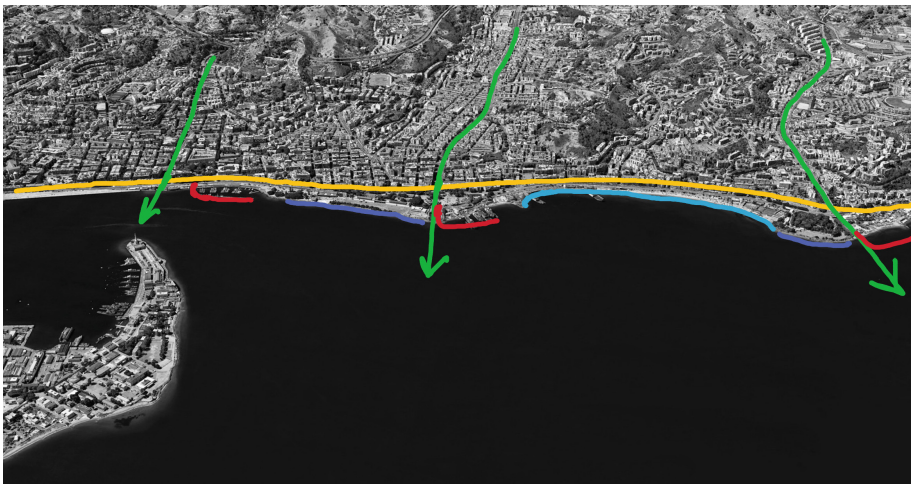

**Fig. 13.** Outline drawn up on behalf of the Order of Architects of Messina for the Waterfront Boccetta public debate requested by the Port Authority of the Strait of Messina [13]

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