



 **Green** Inland Ports

# Good Practices

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Strong stakeholder involvement in  
port development projects

# Strong stakeholder involvement in port development projects

## 1.1 Description

In traditional planning of port projects, such as quay construction, port expansion or development of new terminals, port authorities tend to inform and involve the port users and other stakeholders only at later stages of the planning process. Nowadays, co-creation with relevant stakeholders plays a significant role in the planning process, as a successful master plan and implementation should be stakeholder inclusive (Eskafi, M. et al., 2019). This mainly applies to the so-called “community stakeholders”. During projects, intensive cooperation with stakeholders, such as nature and environmental organizations, neighbourhoods, development organizations and community development groups, is necessary to stimulate economic development and to minimize social and environmental impacts (Network for Business Sustainability, 2022). Because it is unlikely to engage all relevant port stakeholders at the same time, it is important that prioritization of the key stakeholders happens for effective and timely engagement in the planning process (Eskafi, M. et al., 2019).

An example of this good practice is the project called “Maasvlakte 2” at the port of Rotterdam (Netherlands), which has led to the loss of 2,455 hectares of underwater nature. The European Commission has given a positive advice in April 2003 regarding the construction of the Maasvlakte 2, provided that the necessary environmental/nature compensation measures would be undertaken by implementing a marine reserve in the Voordelta near the coast of the provinces Zuid-Holland and Zeeland, which would have an area of 24,550 hectares in this Natura 2000-area (ten times the size of the area that will be lost). This could have been the prime example of the so-called “green polder model”, in which cooperation between nature and environmental organizations and the government lead to a good outcome for all parties involved. However, the implementation has failed, and the biodiversity in the area has diminished due to increased fishery (Stichting De Noordzee, 2022, Natuur en Milieu Zuid-Holland, 2022). Seven nature and environmental organizations have filed a lawsuit with the result that the environmental protection area that has been invented 15 years ago needs to be realized, which will prohibit all forms of commercial fishery and other types of soil destructive activities (Natuurmonumenten, 2023). In February 2024, minister Van Der Wal of the Netherlands has described in a letter to parliament how the nature compensation will be

executed, but a starting date is mentioned nowhere, which leads to dissatisfaction from the nature and environmental organizations (Natuurmonumenten, 2024).

## 1.2 Specific aim

The direct goal is to give relevant stakeholders, such as community stakeholders and environmental stakeholders (e.g. environmental organizations as a voice for nature and the environment) participation within the creation of port plans and projects. These groups can experience negative effects from such plans if not executed correctly.

## 1.3 List of ports that apply stakeholder involvement

- Groningen Seaports
- Port of Den Helder
- Port of Mulhouse Rhine (The board of directors include the municipalities where the ports are located, the Grand Est region, French government and sub-contractors (private operators) to be in contact during projects.)
- Port of Brussels
- Port of Paris
- Port of Berlin
- Port of Venlo
- Port of Strasbourg
- DeltaPort (Wessel) (Regular events or port visit possibilities are being arranged for customers, politicians, researchers and the general public to diminish the barriers between stakeholders and the port.)
- Bayernhafen
- Port of Belgrade (Port of Belgrade organizes stakeholder meetings on a yearly basis, or on a more frequent basis if necessary during the implementation of drastic projects.)
- Port of Stuttgart
- Port of Mannheim (Port of Mannheim gives information regarding ongoing projects on their website. They also have a magazine to keep stakeholders informed, and they hold workshops regarding future projects.)
- HAROPA Port
- Port of Seville (In the design and processing of the Navigation Optimization Project on Eurovia E 60.02, sectoral tables have been convened that have included all stakeholders. Aside from this, periodic meetings of the Port Services Commission are also held, where the operation of the services offered by the Port Authority is analysed and evaluated.)

## 1.4 Stakeholders involved

- The port authority is responsible for the development of the port area. If a project is planned within the port area, they are responsible for stakeholder involvement.

- Environmental parties: They are focused on the environmental performance of a project. Politically active groups that care about the environment can create pressure for change (Network for Business Sustainability, 2011).
- Communities and neighbourhoods: They are focused on the liveability within their own neighbourhoods or communities. Network for Business Sustainability, (2011) shows that wealthy communities and more densely populated areas often exert stronger pressure and use their power more to demand better environmental performance.
- Terminals and/or shipping companies: They benefit from port expansion and may be the instigator of port development projects or the construction of a new terminal. This means that their interests often conflict with the interests of local communities and/or environmental parties.
- National government: If there is dissatisfaction in the way a port authority wants to realize a project, the national government has rules and regulations within which the project has to be carried out (European Commission, n.d.).

## 1.5 Voluntary or mandatory

To a certain extent, this good practice is mandatory, as each EU Member State has a framework to handle complaints and disputes between ports stakeholders (European Commission, n.d.). Regulation 2017/352 Article 16 states that “Complaints shall be filed in the Member State of the port where the dispute is presumed to have its origin.

Member States shall ensure that port users and other relevant stakeholders are informed of where and how to lodge a complaint and which authorities are responsible for handling complaints”, and “The authorities responsible for handling complaints shall, where appropriate, cooperate for the purposes of mutual assistance in disputes involving parties established in different Member States” (European Commission, 2017). However, to what extent stakeholders are being taken into account in port projects is voluntary.

## 1.6 Realised/potential impact

In the case of the Maasvlakte 2 in the port of Rotterdam, the impact of the interference of environmental and nature organizations is that the nature compensation of the Maasvlakte 2 has a larger chance of success than ever, as nothing had changed in more than 15 years. The impact would be substantial, as the area of nature compensation has a size of almost 25,000 hectares.

In an interview with Sybilla Dekker (former minister of housing, spatial planning and environmental management of the Netherlands) and Ronald Paul (former COO of port authority of Rotterdam) shows that they look back with satisfaction on the Maasvlakte 2 project, as they succeeded in creating broad support for the project and included all stakeholders during the project phase. Sybilla indicates that environmental organizations are

full-fledged partners that should be included in the development of the ports, as they can deliver constructive feedback (Natuur en Milieufederatie Zuid-Holland, n.d.).

## 1.7 Possible obstacles when implementing good practice

- It is very difficult to take all stakeholders into account, as there are quite many of them. Every stakeholder has different objectives and hopes that they will be met. These objectives can compete with one another (Coates, T., 2019).
- The form in which stakeholders can provide input efficiently can be difficult. Open public forums can be chaotic, but focus groups may not be sufficiently representative (Coates, T., 2019).
- A port has limited resources and stakeholder engagement and everything around it can be quite costly based on the level of commitment that is being strived for. A situation of resource competition could occur, where projects have to compete for the same resources (Lucidchart, n.d.).
- Stakeholders could be resistant to share information (in a timely matter). This can be intentionally, as some information can be quite sensitive. Stakeholders may also forget to respond due to other priorities (Lucidchart, n.d.).
- Inland ports indicated that this good practice is experienced as medium difficult (Ecorys et al., 2024).

## 1.8 Key learnings

- Strong stakeholder involvement is very important in large port development projects to guarantee that the consequences of such projects is viewed from multiple angles and from multiple viewpoints, in which the danger would be that local inhabitants and nature/the environment would be insufficiently taken into account.
- Terminal operators and shipping companies would benefit financially from port expansion or other processes that leads to larger port transshipment volumes. Environmental losses should be compensated, but this might be overlooked without the intervention of environmental organizations.

## 1.9 Sources

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