

Ports under pressure

A Cruise Insight report finds that every port association – like every port – has a different agenda, but top of them all right now is the complex question of sustainability and how to attain it given that the local, national and global regulatory authorities keep moving the goalposts.

Cruise Baltic Director Claus Bødker recognises that sustainability is the biggest challenge facing all cruise business stakeholders, but particularly the ports servicing its expansion. “There is one big unknown factor the industry must deal with – both in the Baltic and also globally,” he says, “and that is its sustainability.”

European Sea Ports Organisation (ESPO) Secretary General Isabelle Ryckbost could not agree more. “As stewards of sustainable economic growth, European ports will have to ensure that the future development of cruise business is sustainable – or else it won’t be. Ports can be the perfect matchmakers in that process, but they must be able to count on the active cooperation and contribution of all stakeholders.”

In Canada, Cruise the Saint Lawrence members “are currently drafting a sustainable development initiative to incorporate all industry players,” says Executive Director René Trépanier.

MedCruise President Airam Diaz Pastor says his association has also identified environmental issues as a key challenge facing its port members and is developing “an ambitious working plan” to address that along with other developments such as new regulations covering port reception facilities, Schengen procedures and berthing policies and catering for new source markets such as Asia.

He says: “We have created four different working groups based on those challenges that we know can only be overcome with solid cooperation between cruise lines and ports. This is why we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with CLIA Europe to collaborate in promoting a sustainable cruise industry by sharing data

and adopting unique positions before the regulators.

“We also work closely with other partners such as ESPO and PIANC (World Association for Waterborne



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Transport Infrastructure) in matters of common interest often related to the European Union.”

Association Internationale Ville Ports (AIVP) General Manager Olivier Lemaire wants those stakeholders “to re-shape a fair partnership in which the cruise operators’ economic expectations are balanced with proper respect for the communities concerned, maximising the benefits for customers and visitors alike”.

But, as Cruise Europe Chairman Michael McCarthy explains, this can be easier said than done. “Sustainability can mean any of – or a combination of – fuel emissions, exhaust gas cleaning systems (EGCS), wash water, smoke, waste reception facilities, ballast water management, liquefied natural gas (LNG), greenhouse gases, too many cruise ships in port at the same time,



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Michael McCarthy

overtourism, overcrowding, traffic and noise,” he says.

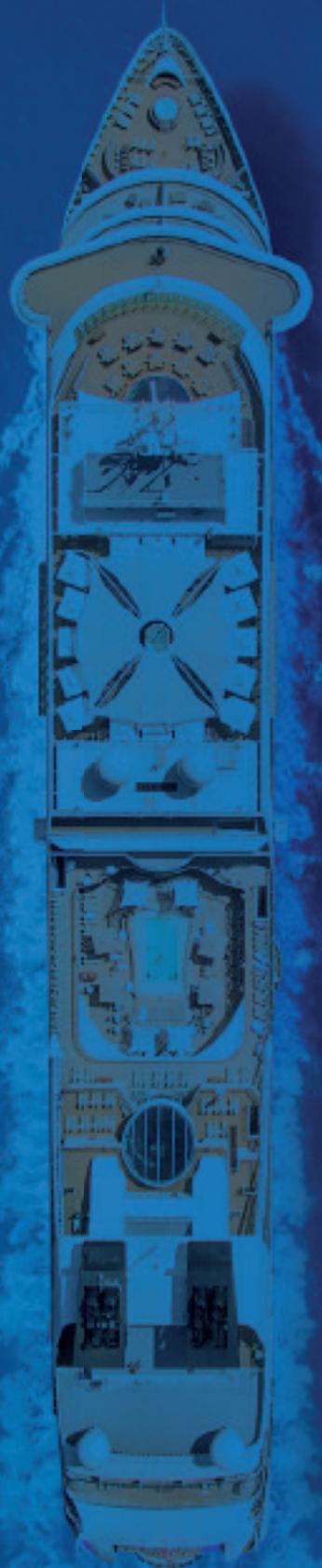
“But a lack of dialogue, discussion and factual information has led to the cruise industry fighting a reactive response to the scrubber debate. This was



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highlighted at Clean Shipping Alliance 2020 in London, where it was stated: ‘The restrictive use of open-loop scrubbers is risking the loss of focus on key issues of human health and the environment.’ ”

Cruising is now a global sector, so the challenges its ports face are global ones – they are not confined to European operations.

McCarthy points to scientific research in Japan which suggests that the use of heavy fuel oils in combination with a scrubber is a better choice than burning low sulphur fuels, because scrubbers are able to remove airborne particulates and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons while also limiting sulphur emissions.

IMO guidelines adopted in 2015 – as MEPC.259(68) – on the use of EGCS were exhaustively examined and given mandatory effect under MARPOL Annex VI, Regulation 4. The IMO Sub-Committee on Pollution Prevention and Response also recently endorsed the use of EGCS as an approved option for complying with the 2020 0.5% global sulphur target.

“Yet,” notes McCarthy, “this has already been undermined by a fragmented approach to compliance, with countries taking different positions on scrubber use – precisely the opposite of what the IMO is meant to achieve from a global regulatory perspective.

“In fact, an increasing number of national governments, regions and port authorities have decided – without scientific data to back it up – to ban ships from using open-loop scrubbers and discharging wash water in their ports or coastal waters.

“This leads to a situation where the cruise industry builds new ships to the most up-to-date IMO and other



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Claus Bødker

international global regulations that are designed to trade worldwide and yet have their operating systems banned unilaterally and without consultation.

“Not only that, but there have been recent communications from politically motivated organisations calling on all major cruise ports to ‘tighten the current ECA, SOx, NOx rules’ and go beyond today’s EU requirements so that they prioritise certain ships and severely penalise others in a variety of ways including significantly increased government and local port fees.”

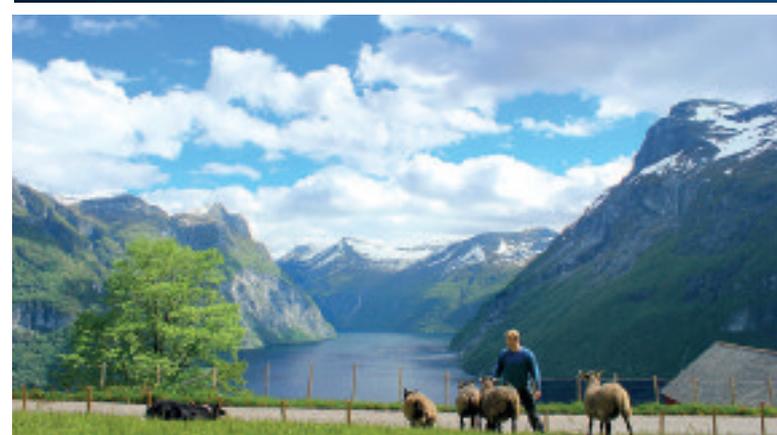
Bødker says: “It is extremely easy to blame cruise ships for almost everything, with a British newspaper recently reporting that each day a cruise ship emits ‘as much pollution as a million cars’.

“We need to show local communities that cruising is a sustainable vacation offer; otherwise we risk that the many negative myths about cruising will win. It would be great if the cruise lines would assist cruise associations with facts about cruising, and that way defend the industry from such negative and false statements – which



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“The woes of Barcelona, Dubrovnik [shown here] and Venice raise questions about the challenges of managing massive tourist influxes in the space of just a few hours”

will surely become even more frequent in the future.”

McCarthy agrees. “Cruising is now paying an unfair price for its visibility, with regulations becoming more stringent. With more than 90,000 merchant vessels trading worldwide and only 320 cruise vessels, have we lost focus on the real issues and culprits?” he asks.

Bødker points out the urgent requirement for a united industry response, given the growth trends. “For the third year in a row the Baltic cruise ports will register an all-time high in passenger movements [this year]. We expect to welcome guests from more than 2,700 calls in which the average number of cruise passengers per ship will be 2,130 – an increase of more than 45% compared to ten years ago, and worlds away from the 723 passengers per ship which we had at the beginning of this millennium.”

Cruise Norway Managing Director Inge Tangerås adds: “Cruise ports need to understand the current and future requirements of the cruise lines, and how to meet them in a proactive way.

“Close cooperation and communication is needed to prepare for the future. New requirements and interfaces need to be identified and clarified, and new and innovative business models will have to be considered. Stakeholder engagement and communication cannot be ignored.”

But a cautionary note comes from AIVP’s Lemaire. “There is increasing disappointment (among port cities) with the real value of the famous ‘onshore passenger spend’, which in fact is largely taken by the operators themselves via a locked-down business model that leaves little room for local initiatives,” he points out.

“At the same time the environmental problems generated by liners in proximity to urban centres is also drawing strengthening opposition from residents, who are moving to block (port infrastructure) projects.

“Of course it cannot be denied that the cruise industry does bring a contribution to commercial port cities, helping to make them more dynamic and enhancing their appeal in the global marketplace. The question of whether globalised commercial ports should position themselves to accommodate cruise ships is also no longer in doubt. All have already done so, or are keen to do so.

“But, as cruise operators race for ever-bigger vessels, private sector stakeholders and taxpayers are dragged into their own costly race for safety performance and luxury in their onshore facilities in an effort to win over cruise lines and capture tourist revenues locally.

“Yet the woes of Barcelona, Dubrovnik and Venice raise questions about the challenges of managing massive tourist influxes in the space of just a few hours.”

Cruise Norway’s Tangerås says: “The most-visited cruise ports today are in the middle of historic cities. The benefits for the cruise lines and visitors are obvious – spectacular arrivals and easy access to the city and the attractions – but concerns for the local effects caused by the emissions to air should not be neglected.

“It might be a challenge for cruise ports in historic city centres to build infrastructure for the green transition and take larger cruise ships on existing premises. In the



Inge Tangerås

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long term, those ports should consider investment in new capacity on the outskirts of the historic city centres.”

The International Association of Ports and Harbors (IAPH) remains primarily focused on cargo but, with an increasing number of its member ports getting involved in the cruise business, its cruise committee – chaired by Cruise Gate Hamburg Managing Director Sacha Rougier – is now playing an increasing role, particularly in the area of sustainability.

“The IAPH World Ports Sustainability Program aims to support ports and cruise lines in attaining cruise tourism sustainability,” she says. “Member ports such as Hamburg, Barcelona and Vancouver are already pioneering different onshore power solutions to reduce vessel emissions.

“Members are using the Environmental Ship Index to incentivise cruise lines to innovate by rewarding vessels that exceed standards with port fee rebates. Audits are being established to ensure safe bunkering operations for vessels powered by alternative fuels such as LNG, and best practices are being created to mitigate noise emissions and optimise port calls.



“IAPH’s members with cruise expertise are teaming up to educate all members to better understand how the

industry works.”
Sacha Rougier

“Due to diverse cruise vessel designs, existing ports will have to upgrade or build environmentally resilient infrastructure to meet universal needs.

“So IAPH’s members with cruise expertise are teaming up to educate all members to better understand how the industry works – the economics involved, the challenges, the opportunities for growth and how ports can incorporate cruise terminal infrastructure sustainably into overall port city planning.

“A first dedicated cruise session will take place at the annual IAPH conference in Guangzhou in May this year. International cruise and port executives will focus on the profits and benefits of cruising for cities, and assisting in developing adequate cruise infrastructure.”

ESPO has also responded to the cruise boom, as Secretary General Ryckbost explains: “In 2014 ESPO created its Cruise and Ferry Port Network, which brings together ESPO’s passenger committee with the regional cruise port organisations: Cruise Baltic, Cruise Britain, Cruise Europe, Cruise Norway and MedCruise.

“Its aim is to stay up to date with the upcoming developments in the cruise sector and to address the challenges. In 2016 the Network published a Code of Good Practices for Cruise and Ferry Ports, which covered five areas: infrastructure, port–city relations, cooperation, relations with the cruise lines and security.

“The key points include the need to mitigate the impact of cruise activity and thereby maintain ports’ licences to operate. European ports have to step up the cooperation and dialogue with stakeholders (local population, authorities, cruise lines, etc.)

“They also need to invest in better infrastructure and port expansion outside the city area, to take measures to



manage the congestion in and around the port, to work together with the municipality to create a sustainable hinterland with links to and from the cruise terminal, and to promote cruise passengers discovering the city on foot.

“Ports should also work with local tourist companies on a better spreading (geographically and over time) of passengers within the city, and to be more transparent about noise and other pollution issues,” says Ryckbost.

“The logistical challenge faced by any seaport is primarily the development of infrastructure to improve passenger movements,” notes Florida Ports Council President and CEO Doug Wheeler.

“Landside, ports must plan with local, state and federal entities to provide efficient access to cruise terminal facilities. Within busy waterfront communities passenger pick-up and drop-off can often compete with cargo import and export activity as well as with traffic outside a seaport.

“The ultimate goal is to ensure that both cargo and passengers can reach their destinations with minimum complication.”

Additionally, the cruise industry continues to build and operate larger vessels. These require stronger wharves and docks, and more efficient terminals. Processing the embarkation and debarkation of cruise vessels that can contain 6,000 passengers or more requires not only larger terminals but more efficient spaces to handle luggage and federal border screening operations.

“No customer or business wants to use a facility or seaport that cannot efficiently handle the movement of goods and passengers,” Wheeler continues.

“Florida’s partners in the cruise and cargo industries

look to the state to remain responsive to the growth of tourism and international commerce. The state is home to the three busiest cruise ports in the world; it homeports some of the cruise industry’s newest and largest vessels, and sees more than 16 million cruise passengers per year.

“Florida’s seaports must continue to develop the plans and infrastructure for tomorrow, which is why more than \$3.3 billion worth of strategic investments are scheduled for the next five years.”

Cruise Norway’s Tangerås takes a similarly positive view: “Ports will always remain a hub for trade and transportation of goods and passengers. The green transition in the maritime industry, and the steady growth in tourism and cruising, could imply new opportunities for cruise ports in Norway.

“The ports can become a hub providing new means of energy for a green future: shore power and power for the charging of batteries for hybrid ships, supplied from renewable sources, along with LNG, hydrogen and other new renewable fuels for ship propulsion.” 



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