

HYDRO INTERNATIONAL INTERVIEWS JORDY VALLS

Port of Barcelona Faces Challenging Growth

Under the presidency of Jordi Valls, the Port of Barcelona has continued to expand its operating areas and as a result the volume of maritime traffic calling at the port has also considerably increased. Jordi Valls has been President of the Barcelona Port Authority (APB) since 2006. The Port of Barcelona is the 16th largest port in the world and the largest in the Mediterranean (in number of ships calling per year; the largest in the world being Singapore and the largest in Europe being Rotterdam).

Can you tell the readers of Hydro international a little about your background and how you became President of the Barcelona Port Authority?

I was appointed president of the Barcelona Port Authority almost three years ago, in December 2006, after having been Minister of Labour and Industry of the Generalitat de Catalunya (Catalonian Regional Government). Previously I worked at the Cambra de Comerç i Indústria de Manresa (Manresa Chamber of Commerce and Industry) and was elected Town Councilor at Manresa City Council. For those readers not familiar with our country, Manresa is the capital of a broad, central region of Catalonia, known as Central Catalonia. I was Mayor of Manresa from 1995 to April 2006, and between 1999 and 2006 I was also appointed chairman of Localret, a local consortium for the development of the telecommunication networks and new technologies.

Not taking into account the present unfavourable economic circumstances, the maritime traffic calling into the Port of Barcelona increased considerably over the past ten years. What do you think are the main factors that contributed to this? Several factors have contributed to the increase in traffic, both freight and passengers, over the past few years. Container cargo has performed especially well in the last decade: in 1996 our container traffic throughput was 767,236 TEU and 12 years later, in 2008, this reached 2.5 million TEU, a growth of 235%. Results for cruise traffic have also been outstanding at Port of Barcelona, which has become the top European cruise port, ranking fifth worldwide with more than 2 million passengers per year.

As a result of the need to be able to accommodate larger ships in the port and to facilitate loading and unloading operations, the port was redesigned. Can you describe the main steps taken for the modernisation and what the plans are to continue it? International maritime trade is growing unabated, and the Port of Barcelona with it. In order to be able to meet the growth forecasts and position itself as a touchstone Euro-Mediterranean port, the Port of Barcelona's Logistics Community set itself the goal of physically changing the port and its environment, creating new port spaces - by enlarging the port and its ZAL (Logistics Activity Zone)- and improving accessibility to markets, especially in terms of rail connections. The Llobregat Delta Infrastructures and Environment plan, known as the Delta Plan, initially covered the diversion of the river mouth two kilometres to the south. The land thus gained from the sea allowed a resizing of the port, which will double its current area to 1,300 hectares. The expansion began with the building of the seawalls, which were completed in 2008: the South seawall, 4,800 metres long, with a maximum draught of 22 metres, the extension of the current East seawall by 2,025 metres, and a draught of between 20 and 25 metres. The sea defence work was completed with coastal corrective measures, involving the creation of a new beach on the south shore of the river.

It is common knowledge that maritime engineering operations should be supported by accurate hydrographical knowledge of the sea area concerned. Can you describe the way in which APB sees to it that these hydrographic surveys are carried out in the port area? Does the APB have hydrographic personnel and, if so, how are they selected and trained?

Port of Barcelona's Hydrographic Service updates Special Order Surveys once every six months to support port operations and refit works, in accordance with IHO S-44. Our Hydrographic Service consists of highly qualified employees: Francesco Pros, the Geomatics and Hydrographic Department manager, who holds a degree in Geomatics Engineering and a Master's degree in Territorial Planning; hydrographer Francisco Martín, who holds a degree in Geomatics Engineering and a Master's degree in Geophysics, and Ricardo Mata, who works as an edition assistant. Our Hydrographic Service employees have been trained in multibeam systems and hydro software such as Hypack, Hysweep, Fledermaus and QTC.

The nautical charts of the approaches to the port and of the port areas are published by the "Instituto Hidrografico de la Marina" (IHM, operated by the Spanish Navy) which produces nautical charts for the Spanish sea areas. In which way does the APB cooperate with the IHM in order to keep the port's charts up to date in a timely manner?

The approaches to the port and general navigation charts are, in fact, entirely the responsibility of IHM, so we collaborate with them in the framework of the 2007 agreement between IHM and "Puertos del Estado" supporting IHM operations in Port of Barcelona.

More specifically, what are the particular maritime conditions surrounding the Port of Barcelona which need to be taken into account by a hydrographer working there?

The Hydrographic Service develops daily operations in order to support the enlargement works being undertaken by the port, which are vital for the future strategy of our harbour. From the maritime operations point of view an online control of dredging is needed to guarantee security in operations due to the very shallow waters.

What, in your opinion, do the hydrographers working in this part of the Mediterranean need to take into account?

As a Mediterranean port, we have the morphological features associated with a very shallow waters harbour, including the technical problems involved with this. We also face some difficulties specifically associated with the Llobregat river mouth and its sedimentary process.

Since the eighties, electronic charts have become a reality and have been well developed by the Hydrographic Governmental Institutions and by private industry. In which way does the Port of Barcelona take advantage of this technology?

Electronic Navigational Charts have been integrated in marine operation planning and daily work. However, our Hydrographic Service also produces other vector products focused on construction projects.

The concerns of the government and public institutions to preserve the maritime environment is growing year after year. Can you tell us in which way the APB contributes to this effort?

We are aware that our extensive infrastructure has an impact on our environment. However, Port of Barcelona has always done its best to minimise this impact and to develop necessary activities to compensate for it. For instance, the port enlargement project was rigorously assessed and analysed by the Ministry of Environment in a procedure that involved all the administrations and bodies concerned and resulted in the Environmental Impact Declaration (EID) of the enlargement of the Port of Barcelona, approved in July 2000. The EID set out, in detail, what actions had to be carried out to compensate and correct any environmental impact caused by the works. The Joint Committee for the Enlargement Works, involving all the administrations concerned, performs periodical environmental checks on the works and verifies whether they conform to the EID. Each of the works has an Environmental Surveillance Plan and an environmental works manager. Likewise, a follow-up is made of the impact on all the environmental vectors: sheltered and open waters, marine biota, air quality, marine sediments, natural areas, etc. During this project, Barcelona Port Authority (APB) was especially careful to minimise the impact of the enlargement works on their surroundings. To this end, it scrupulously respects the legal framework, involving both state-wide port and environmental legislation in force, in addition to the rules laid down in the EID and the conditions it imposes.

Finally we would like to know if you have a message for the young people who may be interested in finding a job in any of the port activities.

I can only say that working at Port of Barcelona is really engaging for several reasons. On the one hand, the port is a very unique place because of all the different types of traffic and activities that are developed, but also because of the way it relates to the city and the region where it is located. And, on the other hand, it is a place where one is privileged to observe the dynamics of globalisation and the evolution of the economy at a macro level. I would definitely recommend any inquisitive and motivated young person to work at a port.