

The Labour Factor: The Docks of Trieste and Koper through the Global Crisis

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Introduction

It was 26 April 1956 when Malcolm McLean's ship Ideal-X left the Port of Newark in New Jersey for the Port of Houston with fifty-eight aluminium truck bodies and a regular cargo of liquid bulk. From that moment, the 'container' became a new, innovative system for the movement of goods, determining, with its diffusion, new types of ports, ships, cranes, storage structures, vehicles, trains, and an increase in organizational complexity. Moreover, it resulted in fundamental changes in port expansion and the rewriting of the port geography in different countries, with the beginning and flourishing of the business in previously unknown locations, and its decline in others. The container has become the undisputed standard in maritime transport and has laid the foundations of a new era for the transport of goods, thus generating a profound transformation of production structures and economic relations over the entire planet. As Mark Levinson notes in his container history: 'Low shipping costs helped make capital even more mobile, increasing the bargaining power of employers against their far less mobile workers' (Levinson 2006, 4).

The introduction of containers, in fact, represents a watershed for the organization of work; however, it is not just about what happened in the port areas: such a significant decrease in transport costs has affected the domestic production of several goods. These goods have often become cheaper to buy or to produce elsewhere. Also, the speed of movement, with ships stationed for shorter periods in ports, has not been without consequences. For example, companies that had introduced work organization models inspired by the Toyota Production System, such as 'just

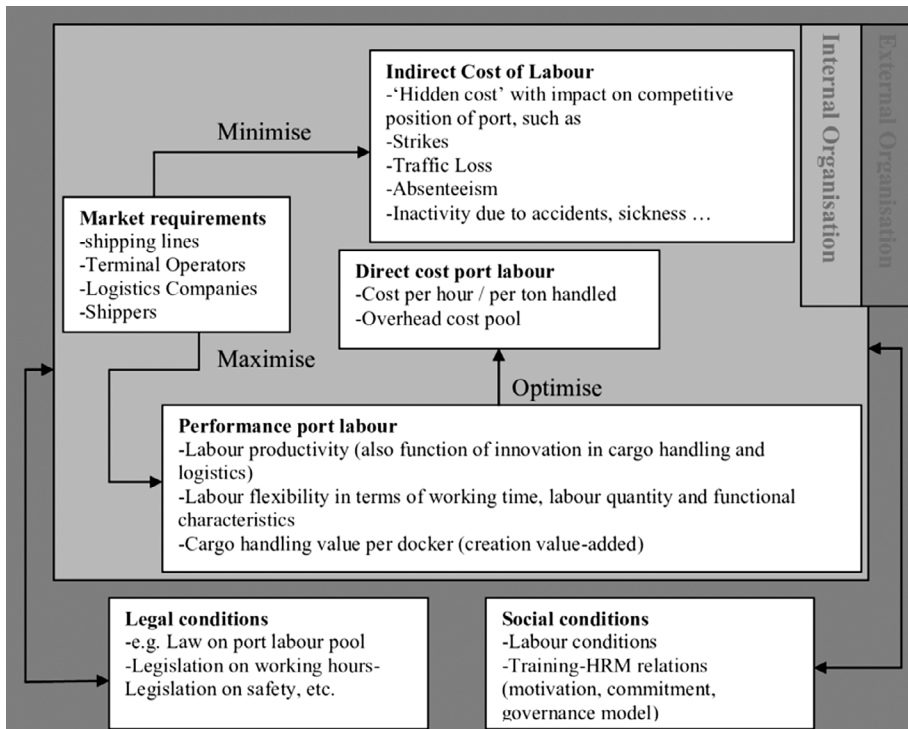
in time' and 'lean production', which cancelled the need for stocks and warehouses in their production organization, would probably not have been able to respond to consumer requests if transportation times had not been reduced (Sampson and Wu 2003, 123–4).

During the time that has passed since Ideal X's voyage and the diffusion of container transport, haulage companies have equipped themselves to take advantage of the new system and their customers have similarly adapted to the new logistics. To match the change, ports have expanded and developed the relevant areas to accommodate and sort ship loads. Furthermore, they have strengthened rail and road connections.

Moreover, the most recent trend towards naval gigantism in the so-called 'container revolution' must also be noted: a course taken to favour economies of scale and contain operating costs. However, the increase in the size of container ships – and the speed with which this change has taken place – affect the entire logistics chain. Substantial investment is required to adapt the relevant infrastructures and to update working procedures and practices so that they can cope with considerable work peaks. In addition, the greater cargo volume of mega ships can result in congestion in the hinterland (International Transport Forum 2015, 54–5).

In addition to the global crisis that started in 2008, the close relationship between the evolution of traffic and the port labour market has influenced the work in the ports examined in this research, i.e. Trieste and Koper. Analysing true port work, namely docking, unloading, and loading of goods, we observe how, while in many productive sectors the economic and financial crisis has caused a drastic increase in unemployment and the closure of many companies, in the ports considered, it has accentuated the changes already underway by changing the type of work required of the workers. This work, as the dockers say, is determined by the ship, meaning that shipping, handling and logistics companies, transport operators, and shippers impose certain logistical demands on ports and terminals and these requests are conditioned by the characteristics and needs of the several supply chains. Port terminals must meet these market needs if they want to acquire cargo on a lasting basis and stimulate economic growth within the port and in the immediate hinterland. The following scheme, developed by Theo Notteboom, presents a conceptual framework on dock labour (Notteboom 2010, 29):

As can be seen, the operators of global logistics require dock workers to increase the productivity of their work by reducing indirect costs



as much as possible with an increasingly pressing request for greater flexibility, not infrequently also fuelled by the search for greater profits or economies of scale. This organization of port work takes place within a wide variety of legal and social conditions and the work systems vary considerably depending on how the proposed conceptual scheme elements are combined together (Bologna 2006; ILO 1996).

Trieste and Koper: Work Organization

In Trieste, as in the rest of Italy, port work was regulated by Law 84/94, with its subsequent revisions and additions, until the enactment of Legislative Decree 169/2016 and the subsequent outline of Legislative Decree, the CD 'Correttivo Porti'.

The Italian Law 84/94 was a regulatory intervention which, in addition to restructuring port discipline in general (with the institution of the Port Authorities to replace the previous economic institutions and organizations, retaining only general coordination, control, and promotion functions), incorporated the important dispositions taken by the Court

of Justice of the European Community, which had sanctioned the applicability of competitive legislation to the sector of operations and port labour as well. The port labour reserve was therefore abolished and the role of harbour companies and groups redefined. Previously, workers involved in port operations had to form companies, which then had the exclusive right by law to carry out the operations of embarkation, disembarkation, transshipment, and general handling of goods in ports. This reserve was guaranteed by means of criminal penalties for those who used labour not registered in the appropriate registers (Costantini 2014; Macario 1992).

Articles 16, 17, and 18 of the Law regulate port operations by identifying three ‘markets’ within the cycle:

- a) the market of operators offering their services to the user, the shipping carrier, and/or the terminal operator, for which the carrying out of exclusive fixed structures is not necessary (port companies authorized pursuant to art.16),
- b) the market for temporary labour supply companies (art. 17),
- c) the market for terminal operators, that is to say, operators who carry out the loading, unloading, and handling of goods by means of fixed infrastructures and superstructures (art. 18).

This subdivision brought elements of flexibility into the organization of work in order to ensure adequate coverage of manpower suitable to satisfy an often fluctuating demand. However, the fact that the law provided for a sort of ‘optional monopoly’ in favour of institutions deriving from the transformation of the companies and port groups, made subsequent amendments and additions necessary, in particular as regards art. 17, namely temporary work. The former harbour companies, in fact, continued to provide temporarily, but in a monopoly position, their workforce to those companies whose staff were insufficient in periods of increased work (Munari and Carbone 2006, 249).

This tortuous process was finally stopped when Law 186/2000 was passed, providing a stable structure to the sector six years after its original formulation. According to this regulation, each port has a single temporary labour supplier in order to allow authorized companies (art.16) or concessionaires (art.18) to turn to the so-called labour pool, for the integration of staff among its direct employees (Ales and Passalacqua 2012).

If we examine the responses of the Italian ports to the new regulations, it appears that implementation formulas and operating models

have been identified. They were elaborated on the basis of the traditions and specific operational needs of each: a reality articulated with different internal mechanisms as to the functioning and organization of work, that in a research carried out by Isfort with the trade unions had been defined as being similar to the Far West (Appetecchia 2011). At this moment, however, the port of Trieste is a port where, after a long process of change, Law 84/94, with subsequent amendments, is applied.

In Slovenia, a new law regulating the functioning of ports dates back to 2001 (Jermann 2007). Like the previous regulations, it allows only one person to exercise the management of the port, as well as the execution of commercial port services. This system has brought about considerable development in the port industry in Slovenia and also in the former Yugoslav Federation. Port managers, who also provide port services, are companies operating directly, and which can therefore make the necessary investments faster (Jakomin and Beškovnik 2005). Since the independence of Slovenia in 1991, Luka Koper d.d. (Port of Koper plc) has become a public limited company, with 51% of the shares owned by the State. It deals with cargo handling and warehousing for all types of goods, complemented by a range of additional services for cargo with the aim of providing comprehensive logistics support for its customers. The company manages the commercial zone and provides for the development and maintenance of port infrastructure. Indeed, the Port of Koper differs from other European ports precisely because it manages all port activities directly, or through its own subsidiaries and affiliates (Luka Koper 2020, 19).

While in Italy specific legislation has been developed regarding the organization of port work, although not always equally applied in each port, in Slovenia the workers of Luka Koper d.d. are subject to national labour legislation and rules governing contracts and administration. The public majority company, Luka Koper d.d., manages the free zone, the port area, and carries out the role of terminal operator. Until January 2020, direct company employees and indirect workers worked in the port and associated companies. The latter were called 'external workers' or third-party IPS workers. IPS stands for *Izvajalci Pristaniških Storitev*, that is, Port Service Providers. In 2016, for example, 36 companies had IPS status. Many of them, however, were denounced by trade unions and workers for infringement against workplace regulations, such as irregular payments, 'slave' working conditions, non-compliance with employ-

ment contracts and safety rules, and the submission of workers to the so-called 'gazda', i.e. the 'owners' of subcontracting companies (Kovač 2017). Koper Port workers proceeded, therefore, on two parallel tracks under very different conditions: direct employees with a significantly higher salary than all the workers of other state-owned companies in the country and the third-party IPS workers with wages halved or reduced to a third of those of direct workers.

According to data provided by the former chairman of the board of Luka Koper, Dragomir Matić, in 2016 the company managing the port had issued 1,237 operating permits within the port even though, in fact, 600 to 740 employees operated every day within the third-party structure (A. S. 2017). The workers – the trade unions revealed – earned only 3 to 4 euros per hour and needed to work as many as 300 hours per month to make a living, otherwise the owners would consider them bad workers. The gap between the number of permits and actual attendance was probably due to the need to always have a reserve of labour available to respond to peaks in work. However it contributed to strengthening the positions of the 'gazdas' that they could, with the threat of using other workers, lower protection advantages and wages.

Luka Koper d.d. had been using third-party IPS manpower since 1995 but, even though IPS workers often performed the same type of work as direct employees, they had much lower wages, fewer rights, and less protection. However, Slovenian legislation provides that the supply of labour can only be carried out by administration agencies, while the IPS third-party companies should have dealt exclusively with commercial collaboration. For this reason, in 2017, following a series of checks carried out by the Labour Inspectorate, Luka Koper d.d. was prohibited from using workers from the IPS Encon company and in 2017, the Administrative Court of Ljubljana confirmed the decision. In this case, in fact, it would be a form of circumvention of the legislation on the regulation of the labour market, which allows the supply of labour only to employers with appropriate authorizations, and subjected to adequate controls (Ministrstvo za delo, družino, socialne zadeve in enake možnosti 2016; IUS-INFO 2017). From the judgment it emerged that the port service providers carried out their duties in the port in such a way as to configure the standards of an employment relationship. This means that they performed their services under the control and directives of Luka Koper d.d. and were included in the work process in the same way as employees. In contrast, Luka

Koper d.d. has acquired a legally binding opinion, according to which giving instructions and supervising IPS third-party personnel complies with the execution of the concession contract, if the supervision and instructions given do not refer to the execution of the agreed services. The company also appealed against two judgments of the Koper Court of 2011 and 2016, in which the Court confirmed that cases of collaboration with IPS third-party workers did not configure the administration of labour (Lukič 2017).

The Encon ruling has affected the entire port job market: Luka Koper d.d. should have requested the necessary licenses from partners to perform labour supply activities or should have directly employed IPS workers. Although the port administration claimed that other collaborations were not at risk, the workers' unfavourable situation was once again in the spotlight when the Supervisory Board voiced their distrust in the Administration led by Dragomir Matić during the Extraordinary Shareholders' Meeting at the end of December 2017. Matić, in turn, stressed that the administration of Luka Koper d.d., in the operational plan for 2018, rejected by the Supervisory Board, had foreseen 232 new hires for 2018 and over 500 new hires over the following five years. Regarding the requests made by the unions to hire IPS workers, he then clarified that it was not possible to immediately hire 1000 people (T. R. 2017; Al. and L. 2017).

A review of the period 1 July 2014 – 30 June 2017, carried out by PWC, has sifted through Luka Koper's collaboration with IPS third-party workers. In particular, according to the report, there was no strategic document that regulated relations with suppliers of port services or a model for managing them. It was not even clear how many external workers were needed. It also follows that Luka Koper made use of IPS third-party manpower without regard for public procedures for the supply of services or the services themselves (Bucik Ozebek 2017). 'There should be a procedure for awarding services by means of which the transparency of the procedures would be demonstrable and that there would be no people involved who were connected in any way with Luka Koper', said the Council member, Rado Antolovič, in an interview with the newspaper *Delo* about the Luka Koper analysis (Babič Stermecki 2017). In these statements Antolovič, albeit not quite directly, seemed to take up one of the union's complaints, namely the fact that some Luka Koper employees were involved in the subcontracting. Besides, in Antolovič's opinion,

the fact that Luka Koper had collaborated with the IPS since 1995 did not justify an administration that did not guarantee people humane working conditions and was not committed to overcoming irregular practices (Glešič 2017; Šuligoj 2017).

It must also be said that some of the IPS workers were foreigners and therefore subject to the very restrictive legislation for foreign workers in Slovenia promulgated after 2011 (Lukič 2010; Medica and Lukič 2011).

Between 2018 and 2019, not only as a result of the significant mobilization of workers in recent years, but also following protests against the privatization of the port, hiring policies moved towards a 'decasualization' of work, thus increasing the number of direct employees. The Control Committee of Luka Koper d.d., in 2018, in fact gave the green light to an important change in the internal labour market. In that year there were 1,311 direct port employees and the number set for 2019 was 1,695, thus providing for 384 new hires. The proposed solution was based on the work of three groups of workers: direct workers, temporary workers, and a small number of subcontracted companies. Luka Koper committed itself to cancel all relationships with temporary workers or external companies that were in place and publish a new public tender. The so-called outsourcing focuses mainly on the management of the car terminal and on the emptying of containers. A competition notice was also to be prepared for the 300 direct hires, a notice to be made public in July 2018 (Luka Koper 2018). 'This model of solution to the problem relating to the workers executing port operations is economically bearable and respectful of current labour regulations', confirmed the current President of the Board of Directors of Luka Koper, Dimitrij Zadel. In 2018, 48% of workers at the Port of Koper were direct employees, while 52% worked in the port on behalf of external companies. With the new agreement signed and approved, 61% of workers are to be employees of Luka Koper, 12% are to be temporary workers and 27% are to be workers from companies outside the port. The new organization was to be up to speed, according to Zadel, in the autumn, or at the latest by the end of, 2018 (Glešič 2018).

The comment of the strongest union of the port, i.e. that of the crane operators, is optimistic, as with this agreement Luka Koper has undertaken the commitment to treat all the workers who work inside the port in the same way, with the same wage levels and same workloads.

What is being configured is the so-called ‘tristebrni model’ (three-pillar model) which includes direct work, work administered, and subcontracting relationships with external companies. The target? More direct workers and a greater wage balance (Luka Koper 2018).

However, using external companies has allowed Luka Koper d.d. to save more than half the budget that would have been spent every year if all the workers had been direct employees. Against the background of this great change there is the lawsuit being brought by the company Ips Projekt. Founded by a group of entrepreneurs excluded from the port following the application of the new workforce recruitment model, it is demanding the payment of 20.7 million euros by the port administration which now pays the workers around 40% more than what their companies paid them before (Luka Koper 2019a; Luka Koper 2019b; Urbančič 2020).

As we have said, in Italy the port labour market represents a very specific segment of the labour market in general. It is governed by the Port System Authorities who exercise a power of regulation and supervision and have a planning and direction role. Previously, the managing bodies of the port had an economic character, with partly executive, administrative, operational, and managerial competences, while in accordance with Law 84 the new Authority has only public tasks. It has changed from being a public enterprise to becoming a guarantor of private activities. Not surprisingly, the new rules require ‘the privatization of all activities having an operational and managerial character’, leaving the Port Authority with the sole tasks of administering and managing the port territory, controlling the activities of companies, and promoting the port system as a whole.

The application of the law and subsequent amendments have produced several variations in Italian ports: over time in Trieste it has caused a progressive loss of the role of the Port Company and strengthened the role of terminal operators. The Port Company, transformed according to article 17 of Law 84/94, has gradually become marginal in the operation of the port due to a lack of calls. After its liquidation, the function of temporary work provider was assumed by a newly established company founded by some of the main terminal operators of the port and improperly by several multi-service companies. Therefore, the organizational model was very fragmented, with a strong presence of cooperatives. They provided services according to a very flexible and differentiated working

regime using many types of employment contracts (Appetecchia 2011). This situation has given rise to an internal competition played on the reduction of tariffs, accompanied by a reduction in costs for the safety of workers and also by the bankruptcy of some companies. Many workers found themselves in a situation of extreme uncertainty due to the reduction in hours worked. For this reason, in 2009, the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region signed an agreement for payroll subsidies to port workers, mostly employees of cooperatives which otherwise would have been devoid of any social safety net.

The process begun with Law 84/94 found full realization only in 2016, when the Port Labour Agency was established in Trieste, which brought together many workers from failed cooperatives. The Agency is responsible for providing temporary work in ports; therefore, it selects and hires workers according to the limits of staffing set by the port authorities and guarantees adequate training plans (Bottos, Conti, and Rustichelli 2019).

The reconstruction, albeit partial, of the organization of port work in Trieste and Koper allows us to formulate some general considerations. The global crisis has had a strong impact on the labour market in these two ports, changing the conditions of many workers. The new needs of ports and the growth of work peaks caused by naval gigantism require a manpower that has a higher level of training and is available to perform different tasks. The multifunctionality required of the workers is compensated by greater stability. However, the issues related to the protection of employment still remain open in the context of the governance of the automation and innovation procedures of the sector. Furthermore, there is the decisive impact on ports made by shipping companies that aim to achieve cost cuts along the transport chains by decreasing the protection of workers and safety at work. The trade unions dispute the claim of the companies for the involvement of the crews of the ships in port operations, causing serious safety risks on board and on the quays and also with drastic repercussions on employment. According to the scheme proposed by Notteboom, from which we started, there is a general trend that affects all ports and that pushes towards open and autonomous pool systems with reserves of temporary employment agencies. There are strong pressures from port companies towards continuous work with flexible start times and variable shift lengths. This also depends on the consequences of naval gigantism and the impacts it entails on the port and terminal sector and on logistic chains. The volumes handled are considera-

bly increased and, given the limits of the infrastructural equipment, in terms of manoeuvring channels, length of the piers, and depth, require a new organization of work, as we read in the Plan of Personnel of the port of Trieste (Autorità di Sistema Portuale del Mare Adriatico Orientale Porti di Trieste e Monfalcone 2019).

In fact, in the operational reality, work peaks are no longer understood as merely quantitative exceptional moments, but as structural elements of a variable cyclicity in quantity and quality. This cyclicity disrupts the traditional working hours of terminal employees and proposes professional, quantitative, and qualitative needs that are uneven in shifts and working days. The variable cyclicity means that we are not faced with sudden surges in the demand for resources (manpower and means) compared with a predetermined and predictable regular standard, but of a permanent variability or possible variability of the factors that contribute to the demand for labour resources and means.

Therefore, it is necessary to organize workers' spaces and skills in a different way. In fact, in a dynamic and constantly evolving context, continuous training is becoming increasingly important, both as regards specialized professionals and for multifunctional ones, with the aim of obtaining a widely usable workforce (Autorità di Sistema Portuale del Mare Adriatico Orientale Porti di Trieste e Monfalcone 2019).

Furthermore, the great variability of arrivals by sea must be combined with the regularity of rail transport, and this entails an expansion of port infrastructures. The expansion of infrastructures is beginning to arouse some resistance from local communities which, perhaps, consider it worthwhile to invest scarce public resources in another direction and support the idea of a more balanced distribution of traffic between ports. However, both the ports of Trieste and Koper estimate that they could benefit from the attraction of large ships and foresee expansion operations in the short term.

The Strikes

An analysis of strikes in the ports of Trieste and Koper can allow us to measure a more complex series of phenomena concerning the two cities and their relationship with their respective port systems. According to the scheme developed by Sapsford and Turnbull, studying the strikes in British ports, there are two models that describe these collective actions and their relations with other forms of industrial conflict: the 'balloon'

and the 'iceberg' model. The balloon hypothesis identifies the strike as one of the forms of agitation that depends on legislation and negotiation, in practice like a balloon: if you squeeze one part, the air comes out of the other. It is a 'plus, minus' model because the strike is the response to a decrease or lack of other forms of bargaining. On the other hand, we can be faced with the iceberg when work stoppages, negotiations, changes in legislation, and even unorganized protests are part of a single block and the strike represents the tip of the iceberg. In this case, the model is a 'plus, plus' model because it sums up all the reasons for the conflict and represents the visible tip. Of course, much depends also on the specific sector taken into consideration and on its characteristics. Various researches on port work have highlighted how, over time, the balloon model has become the more frequent. In fact, with the decasualization of port work and all the other subsequent labour market reforms, other forms of unorganized protest (what cannot be seen in the iceberg) have decreased, bringing the protests back within the exclusively trade union parameter (Sapsford and Turnbull 1994).

Many of the more recent strikes that have affected workers of both ports can be reported within the reasoning carried out by Sapsford and Turnbull and be traced back to the balloon metaphor. Nevertheless, we can identify two strikes (one in Koper and one in Trieste) that can be related to the image of the iceberg. In these cases, in fact, it is possible to recognize in those collective actions motivations and meanings beyond the boundaries of the port, bound to the social realities of reference.

The first strike that we will consider is the one involving the Koper crane operators. From 29 July 2011, more than three hundred workers belonging to the professional union stopped working for eight days. The crane workers were protesting against the new working regime that was imposed on them by the Port Management. Apart from demanding improvements in workers' safety, the crane operators opposed a new work scheme envisaging three operators switching on two cranes in one shift, while currently two operators work one crane. The changes would also cut their breaks from two hours to one.

The formal strike organized by the crane operators shortly afterwards was followed by the spontaneous support of IPS employees, many of whom came from the area of the former Yugoslavia, who demanded the same wages for the same tasks and equal rights for all (Glešič 2011). There were moments of tension and the management of the port threat-

ened to retaliate against the strikers for the damages suffered because of work stoppage. Moreover, the management of the port did not recognize the requests of the IPS workers because they were not direct employees of the port (Je. G. 2011).

The demonstration received the support of workers in the ports of Trieste and Rijeka and that of the Slovenian railway unions and was backed by the organization of the Invisible Workers of the World. The strike and the protests ended after eight days, when an agreement was reached that included three points: first, that the strike was legitimate and that the workers involved would not be discriminated against in any way because of the strike; second, that the Koper Port Authority would be involved as an equal partner in further negotiations between workers, subcontractors, and the Port Authority; and third, that the workers' wages would be raised by 5% and that a collective contract would be signed for all dock workers, regardless of whether they were directly employed by the Port or by any subcontracting company (Vidmar and Učkar 2014, 83–4).

What makes this strike fit into the iceberg model concerns on the one hand the relationship between 'secure' workers and 'uncertain' workers and, on the other, the reporting that was given by the media.

The Crane Operators' Union was set up in 2007 to overcome the fragmentation of port unions and as a response to a representation that was considered too soft. It is defined as an 'anarchist' union due to the assembly modalities with which decisions are taken and because it exclusively groups direct employees of the port. The division between direct workers and subcontractors is also an ethnic division: the direct workers are Slovenians or long-standing immigrants, while the subcontracted employees are often the result of recent immigration and subject to legislation that, at least in their first year of permanence, puts them at the complete mercy of their employers. The fact that they spontaneously supported the crane strike, their attempts to create an autonomous trade union organization, and the relations between individuals from opposing countries in the Balkan wars deserves further study. Irrespective of the ethnic segmentation of the labour market, this concerns not only the port, but also the whole city, and requires broader reflections.

When Slovenia's largest daily newspaper, *Delo*, reported the long strike, it presented it as a 'partisan protest', giving more emphasis to managements' positions (Šuligoj 2011). It also published a letter from

Bruno Korelič, a charismatic and well-known figure, for a long time director of the port, who claimed that crane operators were fighting for their privileges (Fabijan 2012). It was the local newspaper *Primorske Novice*, and especially the national TV reporting, that also gave a face and voice to the ‘other’ strikers: the IPS workers. Many articles appeared that reported the conditions of work and exploitation and this aroused understanding and support in public opinion. National television also contributed to this by broadcasting interviews with workers who denounced their ‘servile’ condition. Even a union like that of the crane operators, representing secure specialized workers, when discussing the model of work organization in the port included in its analysis workers who until then had been much less visible.

If the hypothesis that defines the 2011 strike as an iceberg strike is correct, there remains to be investigated if and how the connections within the port union world have changed the relations between ‘secure’ workers and ‘uncertain’ workers and, furthermore, how the connection between the port and the city has evolved.

In their interviews, the representatives of the Koper Crane Operators’ Union also referred to the hard work carried out by previous generations to build the port in the Socialist period, proudly recovering a part of its past that became a local identity element in the narrative. Therefore, even the contemporary port continues to be a strategic area of the city. Furthermore, it still transmits a strong identity drive, despite being a place far removed from previous working methods and closed, for safety reasons, to nonprofessionals. It therefore continues to express potential. If the development of containers seemed to have impaired connections between the port and urban society along with the territory, the most recent moments of struggle and protest go, instead, towards a new recovery of relations with the reference territory.

In Trieste also, the port is proving to be a place for the transformation of social identity, becoming the fulcrum of a new image of the city. Analysing what happened at the trade union level, the birth of the Trieste Port Workers’ Coordination represents one of the elements of this change. In 2014, the failure of a historic cooperative in the port, with the consequent job loss for 8 people, replaced by workers from Taranto, was the spark that led to the creation of the Coordination. The fact that Trieste employees had been supplanted by workers from outside opened a dispute over the stabilization of those who lived in the city. However,

the Coordination fought above all for the application of Annex VIII of the Paris Peace Treaty within which this new body is always defined as ‘the international free port of Trieste’. In fact, adherents of the Coordination maintain that the port should be organized according to the Annex and not to Law 84/94. By applying the Annex, in their opinion, traffic would increase and so would wages, thanks to the numerous tax breaks provided. Despite the historic presence in the port of national unions, the movement affiliated to the USB¹ is, at the moment, the one that counts the greatest number of adherents and on several occasions has aspired to act as a privileged interlocutor of the Port Authority. Often in controversy with the trio (CGIL, CISL, and UIL),² who are accused of dealing too little with workers’ requests, the Coordination, whose representatives often speak in the local dialect, has been the protagonist in recent years of various protest initiatives. They are asking the government that the special free port regime of the port should be correctly communicated to Brussels so that Trieste should be added to the list of existing duty-free points in the European Union. In summary, the Coordination is concerned essentially with three topics: the direct hiring of all workers operating in the port, a negotiating table for a first-level contract, and the establishment of a special, facilitated tax regime.

Even in Trieste, as in Koper, the regularization of the ‘uncertain’ workers operating in the port has assumed a central role. It is interesting to note the increasingly important role assumed by the ‘local’ trade unions or associations that recover imaginary and specific claims linked to the city and the territory of reference.³

Conclusions

We have followed events in the ports of Trieste and Koper before, during, and after the years of the global economic crisis, placing them in their national contexts. The crisis, which in many economic sectors have drastically reduced the number of companies and employees, has reinforced a

1 The USB (Unione Sindacale di Base) is a union born in 2010 from a merger between a number of different base unions.

2 The CGIL (Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro), CISL (Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori), and UIL (Unione Italiana del Lavoro) are the main union confederations in Italy.

3 The information on the strikes of Koper and Trieste is based on the Facebook pages of the Sindikat žerjavistov pomorske dejavnosti Luke Koper and those of the Coordinamento Lavoratori Portuali Trieste.

change already underway in the ports with regard to workers' tasks and skills (Mariani and Sommariva, 2014). In fact, the increasingly massive use of containers, the development of mega ships and the European competition regulations have influenced working times and the greater use of 'uncertain' labour (Tonizzi 2014). In ports, the decrease in workforce and the dissolution of port communities with a progressive removal of the port and the reference territory had already taken place. However, precisely during the years of the crisis, the struggles undertaken within the ports for the stabilization of 'uncertain' workers and for improvement of safety and working hours brought the port closer to its citizens. In the cases considered, ports and territories have started talking to each other again, but in a different way from previously. The fracture between before and after, linked to all the conditions and factors that have been investigated in this research, is also of an ideological character. In fact, those groups of workers, strongly characterized from a political point of view that once represented the connection between inside and outside, have been lost. This is a process that has just begun, not without opacity and ambiguity, but it is nevertheless helping to convince local communities to experience the port and its structures, not as a burden, but as a driving force for the local economy.

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