

Historically the administrative functions of modern ports and cities were completely separate. Decisions made by one were without consideration of the other. Although historically not the case, the boundary between port and city is often a contested one. Overlapping zones are the battleground of modern planning in many cities. Often ports fear that urban development, particularly luxury waterfront housing, will influence and ultimately restrict essential port operations. Likewise, cities fear that an increase in port business will create more traffic and noise in residential areas.

The port cities of Genoa and Las Palmas de Gran Canaria provide two examples where these conflicts continue to influence both the politics of urban development and the form of the city. Genoa is an example of enlightened relationships between the Port Authority and the municipality. Las Palmas is somewhat more typical. Both, however, shed light on the nature of this relationship and the importance of it in shaping the urban condition. Of particular relevance is the influence such a relationship has on the physical construction of the city and how the zone of overlap and conflict is managed.

The New Genoa Port Master Plan is an innovative document. Its objective is not just to describe a list of "maritime works" to increase port facilities; rather, for the first time, it is to develop a plan capable of establishing a communication link between the port and the city. The new Port Master Plan is intended to envision a new pattern of development for the city of Genoa, one where both agencies influence the outcome. This document emphasizes a common planning intention and aims not at a mediated interface between the two but toward a new condition where both port and city combine to create a new zone leading to an urban experience of unprecedented quality.

The planning of the waterfront in Las Palmas is more typical in that it is jurisdictionally fragmented. Numerous public agencies control the waterfront and have responsibility for various aspects of its spatial organization. In response to the disjointed nature of this situation, the Port Authorities of Las Palmas combined resources to rethink the stretch of waterfront between Barranco Guinguada and Santa Catalina. The result was a consultant's report that represents the current thinking of urban and port development in the city. The Port Authority in Las Palmas has also sponsored a Harvard Design School studio, under the direction of Dean Peter Rowe, in order to obtain ideas for what the future of this territory may be.

The Genoa context

Genoa is a port city of about one million people on the northwest coast of Italy. It is the center of the Province of Liguria and one of the leading trade cities in the Mediterranean. Sandwiched between the Ligurian Mountains and the sea, it overlooks the Mare Ligure and the harbor. Its old port, shaped in a large arc, is situated in front of the historic center of the city – one of the most distinguished and extensive in Europe. The city extends along a 20-mile-long coastline, of which 15 miles are devoted to port activities, the Airport, and the Fiera Exhibition Center. The Genoa International Airport, Cristoforo Colombo, is located seven miles from the city center. This facility handled approximately 950,000 passengers in 1998.