

The Post-Covid Time: A Post-Normal or Pre-Environmental Time?

Hauser, S.J.

Publication date

2020

Document Version

Final published version

Citation (APA)

Hauser, S. J. (Author). (2020). The Post-Covid Time: A Post-Normal or Pre-Environmental Time?. Web publication/site, Port City Futures. <https://www.portcityfutures.nl/news/the-post-covid-time-a-post-normal-or-pre-environmental-time-0>

Important note

To cite this publication, please use the final published version (if applicable). Please check the document version above.

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download, forward or distribute the text or part of it, without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license such as Creative Commons.

Takedown policy

Please contact us and provide details if you believe this document breaches copyrights. We will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

[PortCityFutures](#)

Leiden-Delft-Erasmus Universities

The Post-Covid Time: A Post-Normal or Pre-Environmental Time?

6 Aug 2020

Stephan Hauser

PhD Candidate

*TU Delft Architecture Departement, Chair History of Architecture and Urban Planning
- Julianalaan 134 2628 BL Delft*

The deep economic and spatial link between industrial activities and ports, covering land and maritime spaces, places port cities at the forefront of both climate, health and environmental challenges and makes them possible agents of mitigation and adaptation. Recognizing this particular role, the Port City Futures Team is starting the blog series 'Greening the Port City', in which we will deal with the legal, social, economic and ontological challenges of climate change in port cities. This first blog addresses the legal aspects of climate change, especially in times of Covid-19.

The European Green Deal, discussed in a previous [blog post](#), offers a wide range of climate policies and measures. However, due to the current pandemic, the European Commission and Parliament have delayed the Green Deal's adoption. As of July 2020, the main topic preoccupying national leaders is the economic renewal of the European Union and consensus over the economic *Recovery Package*. These discussions are complex given the timing, the economic situation and the lack of convergence between actors. Moreover, they obscure the legal necessity to act upon existing agreements, from local to supranational levels, to mitigate environmental damage.

In the perspective of economic renewal, port cities are important places for industries and trades who have to deal with a multiplicity of actors and fields. Maritime shipping, for instance, is now a globalized sector, difficult to regulate internationally and in which liabilities for emissions are highly sensitive (Sánchez, Barleta & Sánchez, 2020). The greening of this sector greatly depends on the good will of companies to innovate and invest in the energy transition. The same goes for port city terminals, like Rotterdam and [Valencia](#), trying to find a balance between economic attractiveness for companies and healthy environment for their citizens (see [World Ports Sustainability Program, 2019](#)).

Multiple port cities initiatives – often including local actors – propose adaptation measures. ESPO’s 11th Award for Dover’s strategy on transparency as well as the World Sustainable Port Initiative in Marseille and Rotterdam, for instance, aim to optimize energy savings and reduce CO2 emissions through better shipping routes or communications between port authorities and shipping companies. However, the recent pandemic and its impacts on trades and economies could jeopardize such efforts by reducing environmental objectives and weakening rules protecting nature and citizens.

Explaining “[Post Normal Time\(s\)](#)” in port cities following the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic, Stephen Ramos smartly adapted Ziauddin Sardar’s 2010 discussion on three C’s: complexity, chaos and contradictions and their role in the energy transition to the current COVID-19 context. Although this discussion was developed ten years ago, it applies to the current situation in port cities. Deregulations in the fields of security, health and the protection of environment to prioritize economic renewal will bring more chaos to an already complex situation in ports and cities’ relationships, while bringing new contradictions between economic support and environmental protection.

After COVID-19, national political leaders and the newly formed European Commission have been the main obstacle towards the efficient policies on climate change and environmental protection they were discussing earlier. The recent compromise that European political leaders found on the *Recovery Package* is an illustration of this process. Differences in approaches and visions led to a weakening of the expected end results. In the recent package, the parts on climate, health and research have been cut to a strict minimum when scientists and institutions are calling for greater dedications in these subjects. In the end, port cities will remain places of production, exchange and dying industries as politicians are not providing resources to plan and anticipate for the rise of future and inevitable challenges such as climate change, energy transition and cleaner environments. It is still up to local actors of port cities, public and private, to develop innovative solutions and plan for the energy and industrial transition on their territory.

Public and private authorities are ignoring past environmental protections and regulations for the sake of this economic renewal. Although political discourses are supporting the development of sustainable strategies, in case of economic downturns, the European Union has favored incentives on short term employment and industrial plans over long-term environmental policies. For ports, hosts of numerous dangerous and polluting industrial sites, this means member states weakened environmental regulations with the removal of lock-down measures, such as by reducing the time for environmental impact assessments, if not completely removing it, or diminishing public participation in the process of new projects (Bond et al, 2020). In a situation where the consequences of greenhouse gas emissions and climate change are increasingly visible, it is a great contradiction to use the pandemic as an excuse to save the pre-COVID and already deadly “normalcy” that most politicians are referring to ([Littlejohn, 2020](#)). Especially in port cities like Rotterdam and Dunkirk, in which the air pollution (according to the world air map) already regularly goes beyond the recommendation of the World Health Organization.

An old custom could explain how authorities are getting away with this situation. “Inter arma enim silent leges”, a saying attributed to Cicero, states that in times of war, laws are silent. Many political leaders associated this pandemic with a war, directly or indirectly, justifying, in a sense,

this environmental silence. The weakening of environmental rules is not characteristic of a few countries, but a widespread strategy, observed in many different places (Bui & Calzavera, 2020). The European Commission also acknowledged in its Green Deal communication that there is a lack of definitions and explanations in the current legal framework. One can only observe that in this specific case, the silencing of environmental laws can easily be associated with silencing the public and weakening its voice in economic decisions. In port cities, where the inclusion of local actors and citizens in the decision making was recently growing bigger, it is a significant step back.

Some governments, for example the United States, are taking this crisis as an opportunity to weaken environmental laws in order to develop infrastructure and projects to restart economic activity (BBC, July 15, 2020). Some public and private authorities even go back to pre-environmental normality: to the time where environmental concern was the distant voice of the few, and economic growth the overwhelming majority. But recent elections, both on local and European levels, proved political authorities otherwise with the rise of green parties. Environmental protection and climate change issues are growing – albeit polarized – concerns among the population. Especially the local and European scales are receiving more attention towards the environment as they are both greatly involved in it. Cities, and especially port cities, experience more and more the effects of climate change and their weaknesses against it, while the European Union is the best scale to efficiently tackle this issue and one of the most involved institutions on climate and environment issues.

Rather than weakening rules to privilege industries, regulations have to be applied strictly and clearly to force industrial actors to innovate. A clear legal frame is a first solution to bring order in complexity, chaos and contradiction. Laws on health and environmental protection already exist and must be applied in this dire situation. “Dura lex sed lex” - it is hard, but it is the law.

Acknowledgement

This blog has been written in the context of discussions in the LDE PortCityFutures research community. It reflects the evolving thoughts of the author and expresses the discussions between researchers on the socio-economic, spatial and cultural questions surrounding port city relationships. Special thanks for comments and reviews to Andrew Littlejohn, Carola Hein and Hilde Sennema.

References

Bond, Alan J. et al. “Environmental regulations likely to be first casualties in post-pandemic recovery.” *The Conversation*, May 14, 2020. <https://theconversation.com/environmental-regulations-likely-to-be-first-casualties-in-post-pandemic-recovery-137941>

Bui, Vi and Mark Calzavara. “Covid-19 is not an opportunity to roll back environmental regulations.” *The Council of Canadians*, May 2020. <https://canadians.org/analysis/covid-19-not-opportunity-roll-back-environmental-regulations>; d’Allens, Gaspard. “Le gouvernement permet aux préfets de déroger à des normes environnementales.” *Reporterre*, April 22, 2020.

<https://reporterre.net/Le-gouvernement-permet-aux-prefets-de-deroger-a-des-normes-environnementales>

Chadwick, Lauren. “France’s Green Party: A local phenomenon or an emerging national party?”. *Euronews*, July 9, 2020. <https://www.euronews.com/2020/07/09/france-s-green-party-a-local-phenomenon-or-an-emerging-national-party>

ESPO Award 2019, <https://www.espo.be/news/port-of-dover-wins-espo-award-2019>

The European Green Deal, 11-12-2019, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1576150542719&uri=COM%3A2019%3A640%3AFIN>

Littlejohn, Andrew. “Should We Return to “Normal”?”. *Leiden Anthropology Blog*. March 23, 2020. <https://www.leidenanthropologyblog.nl/articles/should-we-return-to-normal>

“Port of Rotterdam – PortXChange Pronto.” *World Port Sustainability Program*. 2019. <https://sustainableworldports.org/project/port-of-rotterdam-portxchange-pronto/>; “Valencia thinks big and clean and plans a new passenger terminal”. *Port Strategies*, vol. 1020, issue 6, July/August 2020.

Sánchez, Ricardo J; Barleta, Eliana and Sánchez, Silvana. “[Towards the decontamination of maritime transport in international trade: methodology and estimation of CO2 emissions](#)”. ECLAC, United Nations. FAL Bulletin 373. January 2020.

“Trump weakens environmental law to speed up infrastructure projects.” *BBC*, July 15, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53425238>

World Air Map. <https://air.plumelabs.com/en/>