

The activity of transportation is one of the major factors of influence on the development and integration of the local economies. Within the transportation network, seaports seem to be the most interesting example of a territorial economic system, which is forged on the basis of a node of transport, and which exploits the locational advantages at a site where different modalities of transport meet and interlace. The seaport economy gives origin to a set of economic activities, which are direct and indirect related to the maritime cycle of production. The seaport region is much more than just a transport node: it is a potential pole of economic growth.

During the last decades, the transportation chain has been faced with a restructuring process, that was mainly due to the diffusion of the containers and the inter-modality. The handling of the containers is an operation typically land extensive and capital intensive. The diffusion of the information technology in the maritime sector induced the growth in productivity of the port labour, while simultaneously the demand for port workers with a high level of specialization became more pressing. The seaport regions were the best candidates to become the central nodes of the distribution and logistics networks.

The seaport network embraces various aspects of the spatial structure of the port economy: 1) the *physical network* of the transport infrastructures; 2) the *economic network* of economic activities of production; 3) the *commercial network* of the trade relationships between the seaport and its hinterland and foreland; 4) the *functional network* of the seaport, when the seaport expands and invests in new functional nodes outside of the administrative borders of its territorial body.

The dissertation resolves upon to deal with the manifold geographic and economic aspects of the structure of the seaport regions. In particular, the seaport network of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg was investigated thoroughly. The source of the statistical data was the Statistisches Landesamt der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg. The temporal range of the data mostly embraces the years 1970-2001.

The analysis of the statistical data points out the important role of the local entrepreneurs of Hamburg for the growth of the maritime region, and the well-established intercontinental network of trade relationships overseas, towards the Far East and America. Furthermore, the hinterland of the seaport of Hamburg refers the European Union, and has been enlarged towards the Scandinavian countries, in particular during the last two decades. The continuous growth of the rate of containerisation of the port of Hamburg implies the urgent demand for intermodal services related to the handling of the containers. Hamburg has to face the problem of the limited supply of free territory inside of the administrative port area, which has a negative impact on the accessibility to the economic resources of the seaport. The territorial limit of the seaport location can be overcome in the short term by the expansion and restructuring of the port area, and in the long term by the establishment of a functional node outside of the administrative territory of the port, on the North Sea.