

IPCSA Foresight workshop #2

Dealing with unpredictability in a predictable fashion

PRESS RELEASE

What does the future hold for Port Community Systems, Single Windows and the ports and shipping sectors they serve? Potential scenarios and their implications for business were examined by participants in the second of three Foresight workshops organised by the International Port Community Systems Association (IPCSA).

The intensive two-day workshop, held in Casablanca, was hosted and sponsored by Morocco's Single Window operator, Portnet. **Youssef Ahouzi, CEO of Portnet**, said: "We were very happy to host this important Foresight workshop. This followed the first Foresight workshop held in Dubai, which explored the dynamics and drivers of change, discovering issues and understanding high-impact uncertainties. In this second workshop, we had a very intensive investigation of various scenarios, with excellent insights which helped us to consider how businesses can stay relevant and develop services for customers."

The workshop was facilitated by **Will Sambrook of Akenham**, using the Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies' (CIFS) Strategic Foresight framework. On day one, the group took the critical issues identified from the Dubai workshop and combined the most impactful to see what potential future scenarios they might create. On day two, the group assessed how their organisations would fair in each of these scenarios and mapped particular strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Finally, they looked at what they could do to maximise potential opportunities and minimise the impact of any threats.

Javier Gallardo, Chairman of IPCSA and CEO of Portic (Spain), said: "The Foresight workshop led to some very intensive discussions and debates as we tried to anticipate what is going to happen and how it will be important for our industry. We don't know where we will arrive because the world is unpredictable, but we worked to explore different potential scenarios and evaluate probabilities."

In his presentation to the Foresight workshop, Gallardo shared his personal experiences, taking the recent power blackout in Spain and Portugal as a practical example of responding to unexpected or unpredictable challenges. He focused on strategies for maintaining focus and effectiveness under pressure – a topic which naturally led to discussions around how to handle critical situations. While technology was acknowledged as important, the emphasis was on strategic approaches including having appropriate contingency plans in place.

Nico De Cauwer, Secretary-General of IPCSA, added: "I am very proud of all the people who have taken part in this workshop. We have had a perfect blend of members and external experts who have all contributed to the success of this workshop. We progressed from discussing global critical issues in Dubai to narrowing the discussions to what is relevant to PCSs and Single Windows."

Uwe Liebschner, representing IPCSA and Kale Logistics, said: "When you consider what has happened since our first Foresight workshop in Dubai in November 2024, from the geopolitical headlines and tensions to the trade and tariff uncertainties, the importance of the whole Foresight exercise is clear; it is more and more crucial to monitor what is going on and prepare the business for remaining in the market and being sustainable for the decades to come.

"War, geopolitics, new trade agreements, etc., have a real impact on our business and we should take care to have that in our strategic thinking. The Foresight workshop was a wonderful opportunity for exchanging really critical and smart thinking."

Other participants reported enthusiastically on IPCSA's forward thinking approach and the value of the Foresight exercise.

Mona Swoboda, Program Manager of the Inter-American Committee on Ports (CIP), Organization of American States (OAS), said: "The IPCSA Foresight Casablanca workshop was crucial for shaping the future of digital trade and Port Community Systems across the globe. It brought together key stakeholders to collaborate on innovative solutions to enhance global supply chain efficiency and resilience. By fostering regional cooperation and forward-thinking strategies, the Foresight initiative is supporting digital transformation in the maritime and logistics sectors."

Key messages from the workshop, said Swoboda, included: digitalisation is key to building resilient and efficient port systems, especially in SIDS and developing regions; collaboration and knowledge-sharing are vital to advancing Port Community Systems and global interoperability; inclusive and sustainable digital transformation must support capacity building and ensure no port is left behind."

"IPCSA's experience is invaluable not only for its technical expertise but also for its role as a trusted convener of diverse stakeholders across the global port and logistics community," she explained. "Beyond systems and standards, IPCSA brings deep understanding of the human, institutional and policy dimensions needed to drive sustainable digital transformation. IPCSA's track record in fostering collaboration, building trust and promoting best practices makes it a key enabler of progress well beyond the technical layer."

Stephanie van den Berg, Strategy & Innovation Portfolio Manager at Portbase (The Netherlands), said: "Foresight within IPCSA is crucial because it enables us to proactively anticipate the changes that will impact global trade and Port Community Systems. In an era where sustainability, digitalisation and globalisation are rapidly evolving, Foresight allows us to identify trends, manage risks and seize opportunities. This not only prepares us for the future but also positions us to take a leading role in shaping a sustainable and efficient trading environment."





Key messages to take away, said van den Berg, were: the importance of collaboration within the port communities and wider ecosystem to promote sustainability and innovation; how data and technology can be leveraged to improve sustainable practices and enhance the efficiency of global trade; recognition that anticipating future trends is essential for the success of the PCS sector and that this requires a collective effort; and scenarios for the future of global trade and the role of Port Community Systems in particular.

"The experience of IPCSA is valuable because it encompasses not only technical knowledge but also deep insights into the operational dynamics of global trade," she added. "IPCSA brings together a network of experts and stakeholders, enabling us to share best practices and learn from one another. This collective wisdom and experience are essential for addressing the challenges of the future, especially in the areas of sustainability and technology integration."

John Bescec, Chair of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Global Customs and Trade Facilitation Commission (based in Canada), said being able to brainstorm and pull together thoughts from across the IPCSA community was crucial. Foresight, he said, was about identifying ways to "deal with unpredictability in a predictable fashion".

"The Foresight workshop enabled us to look at threats and potential shocks, considering a scenario that is an 'unknown' and make it work in a model that is well managed. In Canada we have a very strong neighbour to the south that is disrupting a lot of things – things that were taken for granted are now changing."

Against a background of risks and shocks, the question is how you make investments when you are dealing with uncertainty, said Bescec. "Technology doesn't address all the uncertainty that arises, but the Foresight exercise is all about how it can be managed, how you can plan, and how you prioritise. When you have multiple individuals globally coming together and trying to build/forecast what a solution could look like, that is where collective brainpower can be at its strongest. Then, it is how to integrate those solutions into business."

Niels Postma, Programme Manager Harbour Master Division at the Port of Rotterdam, added: "Collaborating with this group brings together diverse visions and ideas, creating something far more valuable than if we were working alone. It's stimulating to hear different perspectives, enriching the process beyond what we'd achieve within our own organisation. This is a very valuable input for me and one that's extremely interesting."

Tarik Maaouni, Chief Information and Digital Officer at Agence Nationale des Ports (ANP), Morocco's National Ports Agency, said: "This workshop was extremely valuable, especially with the theme of critical issues. Of particular note was the message – be sure not to take things for granted, especially with economic disruptions, innovation and climate change."

As the authoritative and regulatory body of the Moroccan port system, ANP brings together the entire port community around common goals, working to create a competitive port environment by promoting equitable and sustainable development based on healthy competition, efficiency, transparency and good governance, and ensuring safe and quality services.

Riasat Ali, Group IT Services Manager of RAK Ports (UAE), said "I particularly valued the very diverse group at this foresight workshop, with participants from a variety of professional backgrounds and industry verticals. This made for a unique combination of viewpoints, with everyone having their perspective in respect of their region and industrial domain. From a digitalization and technology perspective, I was able to contribute insights on leveraging innovative solutions to drive efficiency and growth, specifically highlighting the potential of AI, quantum computing, OT/IoT, and secure data analytics. Moreover, I appreciated how the team seamlessly integrated this technological dimension, fostering innovative thinking and elevating our discussions on the future of ports and maritime logistics."

Riasat praised Will Sambrook for helping everyone understand the complex processes and challenge the status quo.

Steve Lamb, CEO of MCP (UK) and Deputy Chairman of IPCSA, said: "This was an extremely stimulating workshop. We looked at the macro picture and documented this into a plan; going away, we must all now look at the micro scenario from the point of view of our own businesses. The main point is that we cannot predict or influence many developments, but we can certainly plan for them."

Magdalena Rzeczkowska, Director of the Federation of Polish Entrepreneurs, noted how rapidly things had changed in just six months since the Dubai Foresight workshop. "We talked about resources, energy and costs. I had the chance to attend the workshop in Dubai as well as the workshop in Casablanca. "For me, it was a great experience to stop for a moment and think about the future and what is going on. We are facing even more unknowns than when we talked in Dubai six months ago. Today it is not 'business as usual' any more – it is totally unpredictable. That is our biggest challenge.

"It has become even more difficult to imagine what might happen, because we already know that our imagination is not big enough. This shows it is really important to think outside the box."

Alexandre Sánchez Pérez, Port Community System Manager, Digital Transformation Autoridad Portuaria de Valencia (Spain) added:

"There were two takeaways for me. First, we don't know what the future brings but it is amazing to consider the different futures we may have. Second, we were not prepared for the blackout because we took it for granted that we would have electricity. With this Foresight exercise, if we imagine what could happen in the future, we will be stronger and safer."

David Roff, of CIF Consulting, said: "What was particularly valuable in this exercise was the political issues we looked at; it was really good to see different viewpoints on the same topics. Some things people see as negative, others positive. The variety of opinions and experience was a real benefit of doing this work in a broad circle."

Inga Mortona, General Manager of IPCSA, concluded: "The Foresight workshop in Casablanca was a huge success, with participants willingly sharing their views and perspectives, guided expertly by Will Sambrook. Breaking down future scenarios and considering what these really mean for Port Community Systems and Single Window operations has been hugely helpful for all concerned. The findings of this second workshop will inform the development of strategies to futureproof our businesses against emerging risks and challenges, in a third workshop to be organised soon.

We're very grateful for the incredible support and warm hospitality from our sponsor, PORTNET. Hosting the workshop in Morocco was an amazing experience, and it was an honor to have such a dedicated partner with us. Thank you for making this event possible."

