

International Port Community Systems Association



**“10 years of collaborating with
the Global Community”**

**IPCSA Founding Members reflect on a
decade of achievements – and consider
plans and priorities for the future**

International Port Community Systems Association “10 years of collaborating with the Global Community”

Foreword: Hans Rook, chairman, IPCSA



C'est le ton qui fait la musique: this centuries-old proverb reminds us to pay attention to the way in which we act in society. It isn't only what we say that's important – but the way in which we say it!

Many people would argue that good manners are essential if we want to demonstrate our respect for other people and make a good impression on everyone that we meet. As IPCSA, we strive for a consistently respectful approach in our relationships and work with intergovernmental and international organisations. We believe that respect translates into mutual trust and cooperation – and, finally, to creating solutions with broad support.

We receive that same trust and support from our members – of course that gives me a sense of satisfaction, but it also provides the drive to cover their interests to the maximum possible.

We have demonstrated that a decade is a long time in the world of Port Community Systems! As EPCSA evolved into IPCSA, and our membership grew in numbers and geographical spread, so we witnessed a steady and very real change – from a lack of recognition of Port Community Systems to an awareness and understanding at international level. In parallel, IPCSA has expanded to welcome members representing Air/Cargo Community Systems and Single Windows, as well as Port Community Systems and Port Authorities.

The positive, constructive and thoughtful comments that follow from our founding members provide us with the support and impetus to keep up the great work!



Hans Rook, Chairman, IPCSA

IPCSA: the first ten years

The International Port Community Systems Association (IPCSA) was launched in Brussels in 2011. Where are we now and where should we be heading? As IPCSA celebrates its tenth anniversary, the association's six original founding members discuss why IPCSA was needed, the early days of the association and its evolution from European to International organisation, the rapid increase of members from around the globe, key achievements, and the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.



Contributing to the conversation:

Dakosy, Germany: Ulrich Wrage

Dbh, Germany: Marco Molitor

Maritime Cargo Processing (MCP), UK: Steve Lamb

Portbase, Netherlands: Iwan van der Wolf

Portic, Spain: Javier Gallardo

SOGET, France: Hervé Cornède

2011: Why did we need an association for Port Community Associations?

With many European policymakers seemingly intent on 'reinventing the wheel', it became obvious that Port Community Systems needed a strong, collective voice to tell their story.



Ten years ago, it became clear that Port Community Systems needed to cooperate and make a stand, as the European Commission proposed and developed its Maritime Single Window concept, said Iwan van der Wolf (Portbase). “Because of the legislation coming from Brussels, it was important that Port Community Systems really made their position clear – in fact, we needed to make clear that we existed, because a lot of key players just didn’t know what we did and didn’t understand the way in which Port Community Systems provided data sharing and exchange at the heart of the private and public port community,” he said.

“Therefore, it was very important that we promoted the role of Port Community Systems and explained that they are here to stay and should not be diminished by the new legislation. That was the main reason for setting up EPCSA.”

The founding members had had contact with each other before but mainly at an operational level. “When we decided to work together and start EPCSA, we were all facing the same direction quite easily.”

Marco Molitor (dbh) added: “The starting point for the foundation of EPCSA was the Blue Belt Initiative of the EU. As the EU did not know any Port Community Systems, we saw the need to organise the European Port Community System providers in order to represent our interests in Europe. For us, EPCSA was the joint mouthpiece for all European Port Community System providers towards the EU.”

EPCSA was desperately needed because the maritime-related departments of the EU had no idea about existing Port Community Systems or what they did, said Ulrich Wrage (Dakosy). “There was this rising interest in the EU in digital topics and building up platforms. We said – we can’t just let that happen without considering our platforms. The first idea was to do lobbying and make sure we got that



awareness. Very quickly we managed to make the most important people at EU level recognise that there was something in place.”

The concern among the founding members was that the EU was trying to reinvent the wheel, said Ulrich Wrage, and that is still true for many politicians at both EU and national levels.

The first ten years: from EPCSA to IPCSA

Before the creation of EPCSA – despite the critical role of Port Community Systems at the heart of millions of smooth cargo flows – Port Community Systems had no organisation, no lobbying presence and no common champion for their cause. The immediate priority was to tell European politicians and decision-makers what Port Community Systems actually do.

From a standing start, the new association developed rapidly in terms of membership numbers, status, reputation and international influence. Soon after EPCSA’s launch and first conference in Brussels in 2011, the founding members were joined by members from Belgium, Spain, Israel and Ukraine. In 2014, the association officially became international – IPCSA.

When EPCSA was set up, membership was open to Port Community Systems and Port Authorities. Within a few years, the association began to welcome Cargo Community Systems (for example, Cargonaut and Kale Logistics) representing the air cargo sector. It also became clear that Single Window operators were facing similar challenges and issues. Membership was opened up to Single Window operators, with Morocco’s PortNet being an early joiner. More recently, in 2019, LOGINK – the national public information platform for transportation and logistics of the People’s Republic of China – became a member of IPCSA.

Today, IPCSA is a recognised NGO (non-governmental organisation) with consultative status at the International Maritime Organization and UNECOSOC, and works closely with UN/CEFACT, the World Customs Organization, the ISO and several other international bodies. It is valued across the globe for providing advice and guidance on the electronic exchange of information across borders and throughout the whole supply chain. However, IPCSA’s primary focus remains firmly on its members – often described as the ‘IPCSA family’.

“IPCSA [EPCSA] really shone a light on Port Community Systems at the European level at the beginning,” said Hervé Cornède (SOGET). “It was a great initiative.”

While there has been huge evolution on the tech side over the past ten years, he said, Port Community Systems and IPCSA see beyond that. “Yes, there has been a big revolution in terms of digitalisation compared to ten years ago. But if you see only the technical issues, that is a big mistake. Anyone can do blockchain, EDI, API, etc.

“Digitalisation is increasing in most companies’ strategy across shipping, ports and forwarding. However, most companies are very reluctant to share their data. On a worldwide basis, everyone has to recognise that you need to have a Port Community System. The biggest part of our job is not the technology – it is to bring people together around the table and convince them to make that evolution.”



Among the achievements, the fact that IPCSA now has nearly 50 members is a major success, said Javier Gallardo (Portic). “We have a significant number of members spread across the regions and now our voice is being heard in many organisations,” he said. “We have created a reference and we are very well known around the world. Secondly, we have created a place where all Port Community Systems and other members can meet and talk about their needs and projects, and share knowledge. We have created that backbone of people and, through our working groups,

committees and projects, we have been discussing and sharing information. That has been very fruitful and is one of the key things that all members appreciate. For example, we held workshops where several Port Community Systems presented their solutions on topics such as VBS (vehicle booking systems) and VGM (verified gross mass) regulations.”

From its inception, the path that IPCSA and its members wanted to tread was very clear, said Steve Lamb (MCP). “It is all about interaction and progress for all, not the individual,” he said. “The way that IPCSA members started to share information was excellent. The strides that IPCSA has made have been enormous, including the accreditations and the way in which we have been recognised along the way.

“All the hard work of Richard Morton (secretary general) has been borne out. But equally it is down to the way in which the founding members, and then other members, have embraced the association and put in so much work unpaid for the good of all. That has been phenomenal.”



Marco Molitor (dbh) added: “In the initial phase, it was a great challenge to ‘harmonise’ the different mentalities and to let the group grow together. Over time, however, a very trusting atmosphere has developed that is characterised by an open exchange and a joint working mode far away from any competitive thoughts. We also particularly appreciate the

willingness to support each other in professional questions or with contacts.

“Another exciting lesson in the early days was to experience how diverse Port Community Systems are – what connections there are to other systems, what tasks a system has and what it is not responsible for in the respective country, for example.”

Key achievements in IPCSA’s first decade

IPCSA has achieved a huge amount in ten years, not least expanding to include Cargo Community Systems and Single Window operators into the membership. The founding members were keen to provide many other examples!

Iwan van der Wolf (Portbase) said: “Of course, we made the jump to becoming international – we saw that the whole market, and the interest, was global. And after ten years we are seeing that the whole role of PCSs in less developed countries is really moving ahead.”

Ulrich Wrage (Dakosy) highlighted IPCSA’s swift evolution: “It didn’t take very long to evolve from lobbying to designing and forming processes and standards. In the meantime, we have been able to work together with organisations such as UN/CEFACT, the IMO, etc. It’s a great evolution from ‘let’s make sure they know us’ to being able to steer and govern developments.

This is really down to Richard Morton and the way in which he opened up the organisation to members outside the EU. I welcomed that. Also, we have offered support to smaller ports, for example in our best practice guide for building a Port Community System.”

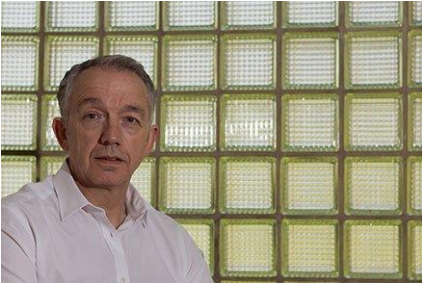
In the course of time, IPCSA has managed to be perceived not only as a mere lobbyist in the field of Port Community Systems but as a respected contact partner and active contributor to various economic issues, said Marco Molitor (dbh). “This is evident not only in the perception of the association beyond the EU borders and the resulting international opening and renaming to IPCSA, but also in the extensive – and still growing – involvement of the association, for example as an associate member in various bodies on EU level (e.g. Taxud), a recognised NGO at the UN, registered expert at the World Economic Forum, a cooperation partner of IATA for various data systems and as registered experts at the World Trade Organization. As dbh we are very proud, with Uwe Liebschner, to be able to actively support IPCSA in the area of Customs and to function as representative, for example in EU Customs committees.”

Other work highlighted by the founding members includes the IPCSA blockchain Bill of Lading project led by Gadi Benmoshe (Israel Ports Company); the development of the Network of Trusted Networks (NoTN), a new, secure port-to-port and cross-border data exchange solution for supply chains; and the integration of PROTECT, the port standards specialist group, which became part of IPCSA in 2019.

PROTECT was established in 1992 by six major ports in Europe, to harmonise and optimise electronic information exchange by means of standardised messages legally required in ports. Its participants expanded to include port authorities and Port Community System operators. PROTECT became a working group within IPCSA at the end of 2019; by the end of 2020, it was fully integrated into IPCSA.

The move consolidated an unrivalled level of knowledge and experience in standardised and harmonised electronic information exchange; this renewed strength and focus will help to accelerate innovations and advances in the sector.

IPCSA: benefits for members



There has been a general consensus that if you want something done or you need some expert advice, go to IPCSA and the request will go out to members – who will be keen to provide support, said Steve Lamb (MCP).

Hervé Cornède (SOGET) added: “We have real expertise in IPCSA, including through PROTECT. IPCSA is really a technical organisation which brings added value and lobbying strength. IPCSA gives its members a voice and a place for sharing. The committees are very interesting, bringing people together to share difficulties and opportunities and what we could do together.”

Size matters, said Ulrich Wrage (Dakosy). “It is really a benefit that IPCSA represents most of the largest ports to the EU, and that you don’t have to show up there on your own. From my point of view, it is important to appear towards the carriers and others as a harmonised organisation; you can’t do it on your own.”

Port Community Systems share the same challenges and are concerned about the same topics, said Iwan van der Wolf (Portbase). “It is very good to share. You can really learn from each other how to solve problems by working through them together. For smaller members, this is particularly helpful but we can all really benefit from the lobbying powers of IPCSA, while from the innovation point of view we can really talk with our peers and get the best innovation available at that time.”

Javier Gallardo (Portic) added: “Through IPCSA, we are represented in key meetings and received reports from those meetings, allowing us to keep updated on developments. Having a specific delegate representing us on important working groups saves members lots of time and money while gathering knowledge on our behalf. We share the same ideas and concepts and we have the same needs – so having the one delegate from IPCSA there to express our perspective and give us feedback is very important. In addition, members benefit from IPCSA’s lobbying, knowledge gathering and ability to participate in different initiatives.”

“For us as a company, IPCSA offers the opportunity to keep up to date in strategic sectors,” said Marco Molitor (dbh). “At the same time, our active participation in the association has led to interesting international contacts and projects to which we would certainly not have had access, or would have had much more difficult access, without IPCSA.”

Challenges and priorities ahead: what will the next ten years bring?



IPCSA has been a real success in being able to explain what Port Community Systems, Cargo Community Systems and Single Window Operators are doing, the value they bring and the services they deliver through a one-stop solution in port and airport communities, said Hervé Cornède (SOGET). But nothing stands still. “The next ten years will be challenging because we are seeing a big change in the structure of the port and airport economy. We need to keep explaining that a Port

Community System is a tool to streamline and modernise these economies and the supply chain.

“A lot of people want a Port Community System but it is not like going to the supermarket. Port Community Systems will evolve and find new ways to add value.”

If everyone is using the same vessels and the same type of containers, the only differentiation is the data and how you digitalise your service, he said. “The more you increase the size of the vessels and the size of the ports, the more important Port Community Systems will become – you need to accelerate the flow of cargo. You need trucks, barge, rail. If you want to improve the supply chain, a Port Community System is the real effective tool. There is a strong fashion today of digitalisation. But the most important thing is the value you bring to your customers and how you improve the processes.”

We can continue to achieve more by joining forces, said Javier Gallardo (Portic). “After having so much success in knowledge sharing, we need to create more value from the cooperation of Port Community Systems – that is the challenge. The concept of the NoTN is an example of the way in which we can create and work with something practical to create interconnections between Port Community Systems.”

IPCSA will need to continue working to bridge the differences between members that are privately owned and operated, and members that are publicly owned, he added.

“Overall, we must agree on the topics we want to work on in cooperation, on the political, operational and tactical sides. But whatever happens we must maintain the interaction of IPCSA’s members. We must work to ensure we have common ground and work together on common projects, to have a common backbone for IPCSA members.”

IPCSA has a strong future, said Steve Lamb (MCP). Looking ahead, he said IPCSA needs to keep focused on its goals and be careful not to become too broadly spread and then lose impact. “The digital age is upon us – we have to embrace it and also proceed with caution, to ensure that whatever we do as an association is futureproof.”

In the rush to digitalisation, “you have to understand the maritime sector,” he added. “The industry is facing a lot of changes – which is fine, as long as systems and processes are tested and put in correctly. And as long as they are not reinventing the wheel. Change needs to be organic. IPCSA is excellent in providing a forum – from workshops to webinars – where concepts are tested and challenges discussed in a non-commercial way.”

IPCSA will continue to develop, said Iwan van der Wolf (Portbase). “IPCSA will need to think about its position in the future; when we started, the main objective was centred on legislation, to get governments on board and explain our position. Ten years later, that is still the case – but we also see that the interest of all the players is changing. We need to agree on our new objectives on top of that, to make sure where we go together. Through NoTN and other projects, we are becoming more operationally entwined – that makes it even more important to really trust each other.”

Neutrality will always be key, he said, but IPCSA also needs to move with what the market demands and how the users want to connect. “We have to have a clear vision of how the world of the future will look. We also need to have a real discussion about the role of Port Community Systems in the global logistics arena. Above all, we need to keep sharing, planning, looking ahead and finding each other.”

“We are looking forward to the next ten years and are excited to see where the journey will take us,” said Marco Molitor (dbh). “The goal will be always to keep our ear to the market with so many international players and to keep an eye on what the Port Community System

of the future can achieve. At the same time, forming initiatives that could be relevant for the strategic orientation of the member companies is a key task of IPCSA. It is important for us that IPCSA continues to be an active group that – far beyond traditional lobbying work – can bring a practical approach to the international logistics field – for example in the area of cross-border data exchange.”

Ulrich Wrage (Dakosy) emphasised the need to take even more care of hinterland connectivity and to focus on cybersecurity. “The challenge is not to stick to what we have. We need to explain to people that central platforms and support are vital and we should take care that it is not a number of platforms competing with each other,” he said. “People think they don’t like central platforms and they would like to have freedom of choice – it is up to us to explain why the Port Community System makes sense. Our platforms are open for anyone interested in being connected – it is not a closed shop business.”

Port Community Systems are critical infrastructure, he added: “Of course, that means we must be careful about backup capabilities and cybersecurity.”

He concluded: “Port Community Systems are slightly different – but when we meet, there is always a team spirit. The bottom line is – we like each other!”

Conclusion: Hans Rook, chairman, IPCSA

C’est le ton qui fait la musique: we will hold on to that proverb as we move forward. IPCSA will continue to look for the topics that will play an important role in our members’ development and progress. And we will continue to show respect and share our knowledge, in a way that makes what we say clear, constructive and credible.

The whole IPCSA community should be proud of what they have achieved by sharing and working together. In the early days, I represented Portbase and chaired the standards and information working group, before becoming vice-chairman of IPCSA. When I retired from Portbase, I was honoured to become the first independent chairman of IPCSA.

Where are we heading? The future of IPCSA will be more members from across the regions, and hence the sharing of even more expertise and experience!

Closing message: Richard Morton, secretary general, IPCSA



Thank you to all our founding members for their thoughtful and interesting contributions to the conversation above. All six were hugely generous with their time!

I would also like to thank all our members for the support they give to IPCSA, to Hans Rook as our current chairman, and to all the previous chairmen and vice-chairmen, and to me as secretary general. We never take our members for granted.

Thanks are also due to the international organisations we work with. We look forward to our continued cooperation and working together for the next ten years!

There is a reason why we refer the 'IPCSA family'. Perhaps it's best summed up by repeating the comment above from Ulrich Wrage (Dakosy): "When we meet, there is always a team spirit. The bottom line is – we like each other!"

For Further Information:

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