

# The Future of Lisbon Port-City Interactions

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## Executive Summary

Ports play a structural role in economic development and territorial organization, functioning as strategic interfaces between local and global scales and generating significant impacts on cities, particularly at the environmental, social, and territorial levels. The Port of Lisbon is a particularly complex case, given its location in the Tagus Estuary, the extent of its jurisdictional area, and its interaction with several municipalities in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (LMA). Urban growth around port infrastructure has conditioned the expansion of the port, in a context where the evolution of maritime transport, marked by containerization and the increase in ship size, now requires larger land areas for support, rather than simply extending the piers. This reality poses new challenges to port-city relations and reinforces the need for effective coordination between port, urban, and regional planning. It is in this context that the CidadePortoTejo project fits in, responding to the need for integrated approaches to port-city relations, to support more coherent, resilient, and territorially compatible public policies. Overall, the project aims to contribute to the consolidation of a more integrated territorial model and to the definition of a governance model with greater institutional capacity to frame port modernization and expansion, linking them to the processes of urban regeneration of waterfront areas as a strategic opportunity for sustainable urban and regional development.

## Recommendations

- Reinforce the coordination of multilevel governance
- Clarify institutional competencies
- Define dedicated management entities for complex projects on the waterfront
- Coordinate land use changes with accessibility and public space
- Ensure mixed uses and housing diversity in the redevelopment of riverfront areas
- Define intervention priorities and their phasing in a timely and consistent manner
- Institutionalize systematic ex-post evaluation of policies
- Focus the increase in the Port of Lisbon's response capacity in the short to medium term on existing port infrastructure
- Assume, in the short to medium term, that the Alcântara container terminal is the key element for increasing cargo handling capacity for the Port of Lisbon
- Promote planning practices oriented towards learning and adaptation

## Policy Brief Audience

Public authorities with responsibilities in port governance, spatial planning, and urban and regional development: Lisbon Port Authority, municipalities bordering the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, and CCDR LVT. It is also aimed at national decision-makers, in particular the Ministry of Infrastructure and Housing, the Ministry of Economy and Territorial Cohesion, and the Ministry of Environment and Energy, as key players in defining strategic frameworks, public investments, and coordination mechanisms for a more coherent, sustainable, and socially balanced port-city integration.

## Introduction and Problem Context

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The transformation of ports in response to the increasing size of container ships, the energy transition, decarbonization, and climate change places port cities at the center of complex territorial governance challenges [1]. Ports are critical infrastructure for economic competitiveness, logistics, and employment. However, current modernization strategies are increasingly reshaping surrounding urban areas, intensifying pressure on land use, mobility and accessibility systems, housing, public services, and environmental quality [2, 3]. The central issue addressed by the CidadePortoTejo project is the lack of alignment between port development strategies and spatial and urban planning frameworks, particularly in metropolitan contexts where ports are physically embedded in urban areas. In the case of the Port of Lisbon, this challenge is amplified by the extent of its jurisdiction in the Tagus Estuary and by its interaction with multiple municipalities, each operating under different planning instruments and administrative competencies [4].

Port expansion requirements and port-led energy transition initiatives, including infrastructure and equipment upgrades, changes in logistics chains, and the development of new energy-related activities, generate territorial and social impacts that extend beyond port boundaries. These impacts affect residents, workers, municipalities, regional planning authorities, and the port authority, and frequently create tensions between economic objectives, environmental targets, and quality-of-life considerations. Insufficient coordination among public bodies can result in inefficient land-use outcomes,

inadequate infrastructure provision, increased social and environmental externalities, and reduced public acceptance of port-related investments. In addition, the limited use of systematic public policy evaluation constrains institutional learning and reduces the ability of public authorities to adjust planning instruments over time.

This policy challenge must be considered in light of existing strategic frameworks. At the European level, the EU Blue Economy Report 2023 highlights the role of ports in supporting economic development and climate neutrality objectives [5]. At the national level, the National Strategy for the Sea 2021–2030 identifies ports and logistics chains as priority policy areas [6]. The project is also aligned with the AIVP Agenda 2030 for sustainable port-city relations [7]. At the regional level, the Lisbon Regional Strategy 2030 emphasizes the need to strengthen port-city integration through coordinated spatial planning [8].

Despite this favorable policy context, significant gaps remain in translating strategic objectives into coherent and territorially grounded planning practices. This situation is compounded by the absence of an updated port development strategy, with the last formal approval dating back to the 1990s. Against this backdrop, the CidadePortoTejo project addresses the port-city interface as a governance and territorial planning challenge rather than a sector-specific issue, promoting integrated, evidence-based approaches with a strong focus on public policy evaluation and decision support.

## Analysis / Key Findings

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From a methodological point of view, the analyses carried out within the scope of the CidadeportoTejo project can be divided into five blocks, namely: i. Analysis of Port-City Interactions; ii. Analysis of the CidadeportoTejo case study; iii. Analysis of Demographic Trends and Land Use; iv. Prospects for Land Use Evolution; v. Preparation of Recommendations.

As part of the **Analysis of Port-City Interactions**, a theoretical framework was constructed that served as a basis for

understanding the Lisbon case study. The theoretical framework systematized the literature on Port-City Relations, the Regeneration of Urban Waterfronts, and the Evaluation of Port-City Relations. In addition, four case studies were analyzed, namely: Port of Antwerp, Port of Barcelona, Port of Genoa, and Port of Oslo.

The results obtained from the construction of the theoretical framework demonstrate that the port-city relationship has evolved from

functional coexistence to a challenge of sustainable balance [9], requiring greater cooperation between urban and port planning. Central waterfronts emerge as strategic interface spaces, where urban regeneration processes have attempted to reintegrate areas previously occupied by port activities into the urban fabric. In this context, waterfronts have become key territories combining opportunities for economic, social, and environmental enhancement with risks associated with governance, socio-spatial equity, and environmental sustainability [10]. Regarding the evaluation of port-city relationships, the literature points to a transition from sectoral approaches to multidimensional evaluation models, integrating environmental, sociocultural, urban, and governance dimensions. These frameworks allow port development to be aligned with urban sustainability objectives and provide an operational basis for indicators, impact monitoring, and more informed and collaborative planning decisions [11].

Finally, a comparative analysis of Antwerp, Barcelona, Genoa, and Oslo shows that there are no universal models for port-city relations, with results being strongly influenced by institutional, territorial, and governance contexts [12]. The cases analyzed highlight the importance of coordination between urban and port planning, the strategic role of waterfronts, and collaborative governance models, reinforcing the need for adaptive and contextually informed approaches in the case of Lisbon.

The **Analysis of the CiddepertoTejo case** includes the systematization of the strategic options for the Port of Lisbon, emphasizing the need for ex-post policy evaluation methodologies; an analysis of the trajectory of the port city of Lisbon; and reflection on the evaluation of alternatives for the expansion of the Port of Lisbon. The results obtained from these analyses show that the absence of a long-term strategic vision and continuous monitoring practices weakens the effectiveness of the Port of Lisbon's plans, contributing to a lack of institutional coordination and territorial fragmentation [13]. In this context, ex-post evaluation stands out as a fundamental tool for improving political decision-making, strengthening the coherence of planning processes, and producing systematized

information bases that support more consistent and well-founded territorial strategies.

Concerning the Trajectory of the Port City of Lisbon, it was possible to understand how the city of Lisbon evolved from an industrial port to a multifunctional waterfront, integrating cultural, tourist, and recreational activities, but facing increasing urban and environmental pressures [14]. The central challenge is to balance the port's strategic function with the urban and environmental enhancement of the estuary and the city. Finally, regarding expansion alternatives, significant operational, environmental, and territorial constraints were identified. Some options, such as increasing capacity at the Alcântara terminal, prove to be essential when supported by modernization processes and improved accessibility, while others, such as Trafaria and Barreiro, entail high territorial and environmental impacts, leading to their abandonment. This highlights the need for strategic solutions capable of reconciling port competitiveness with the objectives of environmental sustainability and consistency with urban planning.

The **Analysis of Demographic Trends and Land Use** attempted to understand the past in order to reflect on the future. To this end, analyses were carried out on the evolution of population density, the evolution of housing density, the relationship between family composition and housing, and employment and unemployment density.

The results obtained show the persistence of consolidated spatial patterns, characterized by stable population distribution, expansion of housing capacity, and widespread demographic aging. The discrepancy observed between housing density and population density reflects structural changes in family composition and residential uses, suggesting the existence of vacant housing or seasonal occupations.

In the context of the **Prospects for Land Use Evolution**, different approaches were used to characterize the current situation of the AML and identify possible alternatives for future evolution in the medium and long term. This analysis took into account Land Use (COS 2023), the Land Use Regime provided for in the Municipal Master Plans (PDM), the construction possibilities of the Urbanization Plans (PU) and Detailed Plans (PP), large

housing developments, and structural urban regeneration projects which, although not fully integrated into legally effective territorial management instruments, demonstrate a high degree of institutional commitment on the part of the public authorities with competence in this area (including urban regeneration projects and urban accessibility and mobility projects).

The results indicate unequal expected demographic and housing growth in the AML, with greater future centrality on the northern shore and short-term limits on the southern shore, with this growth being conditioned by planning options that place political decision-making at the center of territorial configuration. However, with the construction of the new Lisbon Airport (NAL) on the south bank of the Tagus, this situation may change, as this major transport infrastructure is likely to enhance the attractiveness of the south bank of the Tagus in capturing a more significant share of the total growth projected for the Lisbon Metropolitan Area. In a context of high political, economic, and financial uncertainty, greater environmental demands, and growing dependence on private and international investment, riverfronts emerge as strategic

spaces where the port-city relationship plays a decisive role in planning and investment choices, requiring integrated approaches that simultaneously strengthen port competitiveness, urban quality, and metropolitan sustainability. In this context, political decision-making must be based on rigorous, efficient, sustainable, and equitable management of public resources, making the prioritization of their allocation a central element of territorial governance. In short, the challenge for the future development of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area requires aligning the targets set out in spatial planning instruments with the actual pace of urban transformation, avoiding scenarios of over-dimensioning, territorial fragmentation, or the systematic postponement of the implementation of urban proposals, some of which were formulated decades ago without a single housing unit ever being built.

Finally, drawing on a critical reflection on the results derived from the different analyses carried out, it was possible to formulate a set of **Conclusions and Recommendations** concerning the Port City of Lisbon, the Port of Lisbon, and the port-city relationship.

## Policy Options and Recommendations

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Several policy alternatives emerge from the analysis of port-city transformations in Lisbon, each addressing governance and coordination challenges from different perspectives. Maintaining the existing institutional framework, accompanied by strengthening coordination routines between the port authority, municipalities, and regional entities, is a politically viable option, but with limited expected results, as demonstrated by three decades of uncertainty regarding alternatives for port infrastructure expansion and the inability to redevelop urban land along the waterfront with no defined use.

Although this approach may improve information sharing and early policy coordination, evidence from the Lisbon case indicates that incremental institutional coordination alone is unlikely to resolve structural mismatches between port strategies and land management instruments, particularly in urban contexts, namely concerning the timing of interventions, decisions on land use, and investment priorities.

Another alternative, of a more structural nature, involves the creation of an entity dedicated to the planning and management of waterfront operations, with administrative and financial autonomy.

Successful experiences abroad show that this type of entity can strengthen implementation capacity, support a clear definition of intervention phases, and overcome institutional fragmentation. However, this option involves set-up and operating costs and requires careful design of the mandate to avoid overlap with existing institutions. In addition, case studies highlight the importance of procedural processes, in particular the need to align the programming cycles of strategic port plans with municipal and regional spatial planning instruments. This approach improves consistency, compliance, and robustness between instruments and reduces conflicts by anticipating the effects of port transformations on land use and urban planning processes. Its effectiveness depends, however, on technical capacity, data availability, and the existence of

formalized conflict resolution mechanisms when public policy objectives diverge.

Across these alternatives, the analyses carried out highlight the importance of systematically integrating ex-post policy evaluation as standard practice. When framed as a tool for learning and adjustment, rather than as a control mechanism, this type of evaluation strengthens institutional capacity and supports adaptive governance, although it requires institutional commitment and the use of simple and transparent monitoring indicators.

### Recommendations:

**1. Reinforce multi-level governance coordination:** create a permanent multi-level coordination platform involving port authorities, municipalities, and regional entities, supported by a shared programming calendar and clearly defined institutional responsibilities. This measure makes it possible to respond to temporal and spatial planning mismatches, with relatively low institutional costs, and increases the predictability and security of public and private investment.

**2. Clarify institutional responsibilities:** statutory responsibilities for port development, urban planning, mobility, and environmental management must be explicitly clarified and operationalized. Overlapping or ambiguous responsibilities weaken accountability and hinder the implementation of policies and plans. A clear definition of roles, anchored in planning instruments, is a prerequisite for effective port-city integration and coherent territorial decision-making.

**3. Establish dedicated management entities for complex projects on the waterfront:** for large-scale interventions involving multiple actors, a public entity dedicated to planning and management should be created or designated, with clearly defined responsibilities for planning, phasing, and financing. This approach overcomes institutional fragmentation and improves project implementation, provided that robust accountability mechanisms and coordination with spatial planning instruments are ensured.

**4. Coordinate land use changes with accessibility and public space:** make significant land use changes conditional on the coordinated and timely implementation of public transport, active mobility infrastructure,

and accessible, high-quality public spaces. This approach helps to mitigate traffic congestion and social opposition, making the benefits of redevelopment more visible to local communities.

**5. Ensure mixed uses and housing diversity in the redevelopment of waterfront areas:** ensure that waterfront redevelopment strategies systematically integrate a balanced mix of urban uses and a diverse range of housing solutions, including affordable housing and housing for middle-income segments. Although this approach may mitigate real estate benefits in the short term, it contributes to mitigating regressive socio-spatial effects and strengthening urban stability and social cohesion in the medium and long term.

**6. Define intervention priorities and their phasing in a timely and consistent manner:** given the size and territorial dispersion of the areas subject to redevelopment and urbanization, the volume of financial resources and technical capacity required for their transformation, it is essential to define the priorities for intervention by public entities and their phasing, taking into account the capacity to mobilize the necessary resources and attract private investment, without which the achievement of these urbanization objectives will be delayed indefinitely and public action will be discredited.

**7. Institutionalize systematic ex-post policy evaluation:** require periodic post-implementation reviews of major port-city projects, based on a limited set of performance indicators. This measure supports institutional learning and adaptive policy adjustment, while minimizing administrative burden.

**8. Focus on increasing the responsiveness of the Port of Lisbon in the short to medium term, on existing port infrastructure:** namely, on modernizing and optimizing infrastructure and equipment, improving rail accessibility (namely to the Alcântara terminal), and exploiting viable complementarities with the Castanheira do Ribatejo logistics platform and the Port of Setúbal.

**9. Assume, in the short to medium term, that the Alcântara container terminal is the key element for increasing cargo handling capacity for the Port of Lisbon:** prioritize the planned and proposed interventions for this

terminal, both in terms of land access and the expansion of its embankment, rather than continuing to search for possible locations for new large port infrastructures in the Tagus estuary, which have so far proved fruitless.

**10. Promote learning- and adaptation-oriented planning practices:** treat port-city integration as a continuous governance process rather than a one-off planning exercise, by institutionalizing periodic ex-post evaluations of major port-city projects using a small and stable set of performance indicators. Ensure that the results of the evaluations formally inform the review of port strategies and formal planning instruments, including adjustments to phasing, land use allocations, and infrastructure priorities. Support ongoing dialogue between actors through regular forums for reviewing plans and procedures, involving port authorities, municipalities, and regional entities, further strengthening institutional learning, responsiveness to uncertainty, and adaptation to long-term transitions and evolving social expectations.

Overall, the project results indicate that no single sectoral policy instrument is sufficient to respond to the challenges of port-city integration in contexts such as Lisbon. The effectiveness of public action depends on a combination of institutional clarity, procedural coordination, and learning-oriented governance mechanisms.

Strengthening coordination, clarifying responsibilities, appropriately phasing interventions, and systematically integrating evaluation practices are not abstract principles, but practical responses to empirically identified limitations. When applied consistently and proportionately, these measures can reduce conflicts, improve results in the territory, and strengthen the capacity of public institutions to manage port transformations as an opportunity rather than a persistent source of tension.

## Conclusions

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The institutional fragmentation of decision-making levels and insufficient information exchange between decision-makers (government entities, municipalities, and port authorities) are determining factors in the limited effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation of many proposals related to port development and large-scale projects, such as the urban redevelopment of waterfront land with obsolete or undefined uses and large transport infrastructure. This situation is clearly evidenced by the analysis of successful case studies and subsequent discussions with key actors.

To overcome these constraints, the CidadePortoTejo project identifies **two main proposals**: strengthening formal coordination mechanisms between key actors and decision-makers, and creating a public planning and management entity with clear powers in terms of planning, phasing, and financing. In addition, the case studies also highlight the importance of procedures, namely the need to align the programming cycles of strategic port plans with municipal and regional territorial planning instruments.

Another fundamental issue concerns the need for an explicit and politically approved strategy for both port development and regional planning, which cannot be reduced to a simple aggregation of existing proposals in municipal master plans.

This strategy is essential to ensure consistency and compatibility between the development options pursued by entities operating at different levels and to create the conditions necessary for an informed and transparent political debate on the gains and losses that inevitably arise from these urban development and regeneration processes. It is clear that overcoming municipal attitudes of the “not in my backyard” type, which are responsible for the current difficulty in identifying suitable areas for the expansion of the Port of Lisbon, requires a regional approach and an equitable distribution of costs and benefits. Only under these conditions will it be possible to create the political basis for compromises and for the harmonization of competing or divergent interests.

In this context, defining a framework for the equitable redistribution of benefits and burdens

at the intermunicipal level is essential to address potential drawbacks or constraints imposed on municipal proposals for urban development or regeneration. No waterfront municipality will accept bearing the burden of port infrastructure expansion without some form of compensation, whether financial or in

the form of more advantageous land use at the local level. Improvements to public spaces, acceptance of mixed land use, support for the development of affordable housing, and the strengthening of transport and accessibility systems are examples of possible compensatory measures.

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