

Press release
November 2026

21st AIVP World Conference Cities & Ports: Nearly 400 International Stakeholders Shape the Future of Port Cities in Dunkirk

From 3 to 6 November, Dunkirk hosted the 21st World Conference Cities & Ports, organised by the International Association Cities & Ports (AIVP), in partnership with the Dunkirk Urban Community and Dunkerque-Port. Held under the theme "Cities and Ports in Motion: Time to Act!", this edition brought together nearly 400 participants from around 40 nationalities, including representatives of local authorities, port authorities, businesses, experts and researchers.

Against a global backdrop of accelerating climate change, industrial transformation, and geopolitical and social tensions, discussions highlighted a shared conviction: cities and ports are part of the same ecosystem and must strengthen their cooperation for their mutual benefit and that of the communities they serve. Their future depends on a long-term vision and a shared strategy that balances economic development, environmental transition and residents' quality of life. With the renewal of its governance, the presentation of the AIVP Antoine Rufenacht Award and the signing of new cooperation agreements, this edition also marked a new milestone in the development of AIVP's international network.

Amid Global Transitions, Cities and Ports Called Upon to Build a Shared Future

How can port cities adapt to an increasingly uncertain world while sustainably improving the quality of life of their residents? This question was at the heart of four days of debates, roundtable discussions and experience-sharing sessions featuring port city stakeholders from across the globe, including Long Beach, Sydney, Durban, Abidjan, Busan, Riga, Quebec City, Bordeaux, Oslo, Kribi, Paris, Marseille, Venice and Seattle. Nearly 80 speakers took to the stage, reflecting the diversity and depth of the discussions.

As port territories find themselves on the front line of economic, environmental and social transformations, discussions highlighted the need to move beyond siloed approaches to development. The challenge is no longer simply to ensure the performance of port infrastructure, but to build more resilient and inclusive territories capable of adapting to crises of all kinds by leveraging functional redundancy and the complementary strengths of different stakeholders.

Several key priorities emerged from the discussions:

- **Strengthening shared governance between cities and ports** to better coordinate development strategies, investments and land-use planning, while encouraging greater citizen participation;

- **Supporting energy and industrial transitions** by positioning port territories as hubs for energy production, innovation and distribution, serving both economic activities and urban needs;
- **Anticipating and managing climate and environmental risks**, including rising sea levels, air and water pollution, and infrastructure vulnerability. To address these challenges, port city stakeholders must develop territory-wide resilience strategies based on coordinated management. Measures discussed included maintaining waterways and protective infrastructure, dredging, beach nourishment and improving stormwater drainage;
- **Putting residents and quality of life back at the heart of city-port projects** by reconnecting port areas with the urban fabric, developing spaces dedicated to water and greenery, particularly through ecological restoration, creating ecological compensation areas, protecting wildlife and biodiversity, and fostering greater community engagement with ongoing transformations;
- **Identifying and developing new investment models** based on risk-sharing, public-private cooperation and a shared long-term vision for the entire city-port ecosystem.

The conference also featured two keynote addresses that encouraged participants to take a broader perspective on how city-port territories are designed and governed.

Focusing on adaptability, cooperation and systems thinking, Isabelle Cussac offered insights into how to design and develop more robust city-port ecosystems. Her approach emphasised the importance of creating greater room for manoeuvre to manage instability and turning city-port interdependencies into a source of resilience in times of crisis.

Meanwhile, Carlos Moreno revisited the principles behind the development of the 15-minute city concept, highlighting the central and pioneering role of port cities in shaping new models of territorial development that benefit residents and strengthen social connections, with proximity and resilience at their core.

One key takeaway emerged from this edition: port cities are at the heart of the challenges that will shape humanity's future. They are not only sources of solutions but also pioneering territories for climate change adaptation and living laboratories for rethinking economic, social and environmental proximity. Achieving this ambition will require, more than ever, the sharing of experiences, ongoing dialogue and the development of a common vision for city-port development.

Dunkirk: An International Showcase for City-Port Transformation

By hosting the 21st edition of the conference, Dunkirk provided international delegations with a particularly relevant opportunity to observe first-hand the transformations currently reshaping port cities and territories.

From urban regeneration and industrial and port transformation to institutional cooperation and citizen engagement, the Dunkirk area illustrates several of the key priorities championed by AIVP.

"We are going through a period of uncertainty, both in France and internationally. Today's concerns also reflect the difficulties we have faced in the past in addressing the challenges of globalisation and the energy transition. In Dunkirk, we made an early decision to embrace openness to the world and to others, viewing these transformations not as constraints, but as opportunities for development. This is undoubtedly one of the key lessons Dunkirk can share during this conference: turning our ports

into genuine drivers of development and territorial transformation." – **Patrice VERGRIETE, President of the Communauté urbaine de Dunkerque**

The mobilisation of local stakeholders and the international network highlighted the ongoing transformation of the Dunkirk area, while emphasising the importance of a territorial development approach that reconciles industrial, port and urban ambitions with residents' expectations.

This momentum was also reflected in **the signing of the AIVP Port Center Charter by AIVP, the Dunkirk Urban Community, Dunkerque-Port and the Dunkerque Port Center**, reaffirming their commitment to strengthening ties between port activities and local communities.

"In Dunkirk, we share a collective ambition with all our partners, foremost among them the Dunkirk Urban Community and ÉcosystèmeD: to build an increasingly competitive, multimodal port committed to environmental transitions, while strengthening its ties with the city and its residents. It was in this spirit that we took the opportunity of the AIVP conference to renew the Dunkerque Port Center partnership charter. This is a powerful symbolic gesture that reflects our shared determination to make dialogue, engagement and closer connections between the port and local communities a lasting and tangible commitment. Our ambition goes far beyond industrial and logistics development: together, we want to build a territory that is open to the world, proud of its industrial and maritime heritage, and where people can enjoy a high quality of life and work." – ***Maurice GEORGES, Chairman of the Executive Board of Dunkerque-Port***

The conference also welcomed a Latvian delegation comprising port authorities and business representatives, who attended to strengthen cooperation with the Dunkirk area.

New Governance and Stronger International Cooperation

Beyond the discussions and insights shared, this edition was marked by several major announcements shaping the future of AIVP and its international network.

The association notably announced the election of **Olga Farman, President and CEO of the Port of Québec, as its new President, succeeding Édouard Philippe, Mayor of Le Havre**. She will be joined by Johan Klaps, Chairman of the Port of Antwerp-Bruges and Alderman of the City of Antwerp, elected Vice-President, as well as Inés Rey García, Mayor of A Coruña, and Jean-Frédéric Laurent, General Delegate of the French Ports Association (Union des Ports de France), elected Secretary and Treasurer of AIVP, respectively.

This new leadership team will be tasked with further developing the network and supporting port cities as they navigate major economic, environmental and societal transformations.

Several cooperation initiatives were also announced in Dunkirk, including:

- A cooperation agreement bringing together AIVP, the City and Port of Bordeaux, and the Port Authority of Kribi (Cameroon);
- The announcement of a cooperation agreement between AIVP and Enabel, the Belgian development agency;
- The launch of AIVP's 2026-2028 North America strategy, aimed at expanding its activities and presence across the region.

These announcements reflect AIVP's commitment to strengthening knowledge exchange, partnerships and the sharing of best practices among port cities, across geographical and institutional boundaries.

Port of Los Angeles Honoured for Its Waterfront Transformation

Another highlight of the conference was the presentation of the AIVP Antoine Rufenacht Award, which, in its second edition, was awarded to the Port of Los Angeles for its San Pedro Waterfront transformation project. The jury praised the project's long-term strategic vision, which aims to gradually open up the waterfront to residents and visitors.

A special mention was also awarded to the Port and City of Cotonou (Benin) for a project combining urban improvements and artistic initiatives to enhance working conditions for port stakeholders and strengthen connections between the city and the port.

Both initiatives highlight the importance of placing local communities at the heart of port transformations, guided by a long-term strategic vision.

Looking Ahead to 2050: AIVP Embarks on a New Strategic Reflection

As port cities face increasing pressure on land use, the impacts of climate change, shifts in global trade and technological transformations over the coming decades, the Dunkirk conference also marks the beginning of a new strategic chapter for AIVP.

The association announced that it will undertake a revision of its Agenda 2030 to adapt it to the challenges port cities will face by 2050.

This process will notably aim to strengthen integrated approaches to city-port development, improve risk anticipation and continue shaping development models that balance competitiveness, sustainability and the well-being of local communities.

"Our priorities are evolving. Port cities must now demonstrate greater adaptability while continuing to serve as vital connectors for the movement of goods and people. As an international organisation, we have a collective responsibility to continue sharing experiences, advancing knowledge and fostering solidarity among port cities worldwide, whatever the circumstances. This is the driving force behind the work we will undertake to revise AIVP's Agenda 2030." **– Olga FARMAN, President of AIVP and President and CEO of the Port of Québec**

The next World Conference Cities & Ports will take place from 2 to 5 November 2027 in Busan, South Korea. This 22nd edition will build on the discussions initiated in Dunkirk and sustain international engagement around the future of city-port territories.

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