

PORTUS



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Call for Papers 2026

Special Issue *“Landscapes of Port Clusters: Rethinking Port-City Territories in a Networked Era”*

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PORTUSplus – published by RETE, International Association for the Collaboration between Ports and Cities – is an open-access and peer-reviewed journal, dedicated to the multidisciplinary study of themes concerning the **urban waterfronts** and the **relationship between ports and cities**.

The Journal (portusplus.org) publishes and promotes scientific products and investigations—including original works, experimental or theoretical studies, research results, etc.—concerning different fields of interest from a global perspective.

The objective is to encourage the dissemination of knowledge and stimulate the international debate by promoting a systemic and interdisciplinary approach to investigation and application, while also exploring the interaction between policies and practices in the process.

More information <[Aims and Scope](#)>

Promoting the communication and development of scientific research—which plays an increasingly relevant role in contemporary society—PORTUSplus invites scholars and researchers, practitioners and policymakers, experts and other stakeholders to respond to the Call for Papers for the **Special Issue *“Landscapes of Port Clusters: Rethinking Port-City Territories in a Networked Era”***. We welcome the submission of original papers, empirical analyses, case studies, and best practices across the multiple disciplines related to the themes described below.

Submissions should promote the understanding and development of port clusters as new spatial formations and governance models for coastal operational areas, offering new perspectives, empirical data or theoretical advancements capable of guiding future policies and practices.

LANDSCAPES OF PORT CLUSTERS: RETHINKING PORT-CITY TERRITORIES IN A NETWORKED ERA (*)

In recent decades, the **global port system** has undergone profound transformations driven by **logistics integration**, **governance reforms**, and the **increasing complexity** of maritime networks. Among these shifts, the emergence of **port clusters**—defined as **geographically concentrated** and **functionally interconnected systems** of ports, infrastructures, and related activities—has become a key paradigm for understanding contemporary port development.

Today, half of European port-managing bodies administer two or more ports, compared to 44% in 2016. According to the *Trends in European Ports' Governance* report by the European Sea Ports Organization (ESPO), “more and more ports are clustering, either with other ports, or with other stakeholders in the port ecosystem and beyond” (2022). This trend reflects a broader shift toward **cooperation**, **integration**, and **systemic organization** within the European port landscape.

Port clusterisation, i.e. the **administrative merging** of two or more ports in the same economic region, is now reshaping the **spatial, environmental, and socio-political dimensions** of port-city territories. By aggregating multiple ports into coordinated systems, clusters dissolve the traditional one-to-one relationship between port and city, generating **polycentric, multi-scalar, and networked spatial configurations**. These new formations extend across coastal and inland territories, intertwining **logistics platforms, urban settlements, ecological systems**, and **infrastructural corridors**.

Advanced European examples—such as the Port of Antwerp–Bruges, the HAROPA port system (Le Havre–Rouen–Paris), and Valenciaport (Valencia–Sagunto–Gandía)—demonstrate how clustering processes can foster **functional complementarity, infrastructure sharing, and integrated governance** across ports of different sizes, from major hubs to small- and medium-sized terminals. More recent developments—such as those observed in Italian ports, unified into port system authorities through the 2016 reform—highlight the need to closely monitor the evolution of this complex and still unfolding phenomenon.

Despite their growing relevance, port clusters remain underexplored from a **spatial and design perspective**. While widely investigated in economics and transport geography, their **urban, architectural, and landscape implications** are still insufficiently addressed. As emerging “landscapes of the cluster” (Moretti, 2025), these systems produce **new spatial patterns** and **hybrid interfaces** that challenge conventional **planning tools** and disciplinary boundaries within a new and broader dimension. Furthermore, the merging of several ports raises strategic questions regarding the role of their individual roles within the cluster—taking into account their size and impact—as well as the **rationalization of functions** and the **optimization of the use** of coastal land and the port hinterland.

This Special Issue of PORTUSplus invites contributions that critically explore port clusters as **complex, adaptive, and spatially embedded systems**, fostering **interdisciplinary dialogue** across architecture, urban planning, geography, and maritime studies.

POTENTIAL TOPICS

To attract a diversified and multidisciplinary set of contributions, we encourage papers on the following topics (this list is not exhaustive):

Spatial and Territorial Configurations of Port Clusters

The spatial organization of port clusters represents a fundamental shift in the way port systems are managed, understood, and designed. Moving beyond the traditional model of the single port-city, contemporary port development increasingly operates through distributed, networked, and polycentric territorial systems, where multiple ports, logistics platforms, and urban settlements interact across extended geographies. Therefore, when examined through a morphological and typological lens, port clusters can be interpreted as multi-scalar constructs.

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Governance and Institutional Transformations from Systems to Clusters

The consolidation of port clusters has been accompanied by significant shifts in governance models. This evolution reflects a move from a competitive, port-centric logic toward collaborative and integrated governance strategies, aimed at optimizing resources, infrastructures, and territorial synergies. In this context, large, medium, and small ports assume differentiated yet complementary roles, contributing to more resilient, flexible, and spatially distributed systems that respond to both global market dynamics and local territorial conditions.

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Port-City-Territory Interfaces

The evolution of port clusters is giving rise to hybrid interfaces where logistical, urban, and environmental systems intersect. Ports, cities, and hinterlands increasingly operate as interdependent territorial systems, characterized by overlapping functions, shared infrastructures, and continuous transitions. These emerging configurations challenge established models of separation and invite new approaches to design, planning, and governance capable of addressing conflicts, fostering synergies, and promoting the coexistence of diverse uses within port-city territories.

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Infrastructure Networks and Logistics Integration across Scales

Port clusters are structured through increasingly interconnected infrastructure networks that integrate maritime, rail, road, and inland waterway systems into cohesive logistical chains. The development of intermodal corridors, together with processes of infrastructure sharing, optimization, and rationalization, enables more efficient flows of goods while reducing redundancies and environmental impacts. Within these systems, large hubs, medium terminals, and smaller ports contribute in complementary ways, forming distributed and flexible logistics geographies that rely on coordination rather than competition. The adoption of all-inclusive planning and design tools, including data-driven approaches and digital platforms, becomes essential to manage complexity and enhance interoperability across scales.

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Environmental Transitions and Sustainable Port Clusters

The increasing interconnectedness of port infrastructures and territories calls for coordinated strategies, that integrate energy networks, logistics systems, and land use. Approaches grounded in circular economy principles and ecological restoration are fostering the development of nature-based and hybrid infrastructures that operate across port, urban, and natural environments. Within this framework, small- and medium-sized ports assume a pivotal role, supporting distributed, adaptive, and resilient strategies that drive the sustainable transformation of port clusters across multiple hierarchies.

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Methods and Tools for Spatial Analysis of Port Clusters

Building on emerging approaches in mapping, cartography, lexical categories, and spatial analytics, innovative methods and tools capable of capturing the spatial complexity of port clusters as multi-scalar, dynamic, and relational systems can emerge. Particular attention should be paid to methodologies that explore how design research, data-driven models, and all-inclusive planning tools can reveal hidden patterns of interconnectedness, flows, and territorial transformations, enabling a deeper understanding of port clusters as operational landscapes.

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Comparative Perspectives and Future Scenarios for Clustered Port-City Regions

As port clusterization is an emerging and evolving phenomenon, both advanced and early-stage configurations reveal distinct spatial, governance, and infrastructural characteristics. Comparative analyses across diverse case studies can highlight common patterns, divergences, and potential development trajectories. Future scenarios should address ongoing transformations—such as climate change, digitalization, and shifting trade geographies—positioning port clusters as key agents in shaping adaptive, resilient, and sustainable port-city regions.

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SUGGESTED RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To guide potential contributors, we suggest the following research questions:

1. How does port clusterization redefine the spatial relationship between ports, cities, and territories?
2. In what ways do port clusters generate new landscapes and spatial typologies beyond the traditional port-city interface?
3. What governance models are most effective in managing the complexity and multi-scalar nature of port clusters?
4. How can spatial planning and design disciplines contribute to the integrated development of port clusters?
5. What role do port clusters play—or could they play—in addressing climate change, energy transition, and environmental sustainability?
6. How do infrastructure sharing and functional complementarities reshape logistics geographies within clusters?
7. Which tools and methodologies (e.g. mapping, indicators, spatial analysis) are most effective in interpreting and designing port cluster systems?
8. How can architecture engage with port clusterization, redefining the design of buildings, infrastructures, and public spaces across multiple scales within evolving port-city territories?

Process of Abstract / Paper Submission

PORTUSplus publishes exclusively papers that have not been published previously and are not under consideration for publication elsewhere, rigorous, well-written, high-quality, high-impact papers, with findings of basic/experimental research and development, as well as applications and innovative practices to generate discussions and new prospects.

Participation in the selection for publication in PORTUSplus Journal (portusplus.org) requires to answer the "Call for papers" by submitting the abstract and the paper within the established deadlines and following the instructions for the online "**Submission Step by Step**", or using the Editorial Team contacts (see below).

More information <[Online Submission](#)>, <[Submission Preparation Checklist](#)>

Acceptance of abstracts and, subsequently, of full papers is based on originality and importance of observations and investigations, works quality and evidences validity, presentation clarity, and relevance both for readership and for fields of interest of the Journal.

Empirical investigations, comparisons and exemplary real-world achievements, as well as papers exploring the connections between disciplines are considered of relevant interest; theoretical concepts and application-oriented developments, studies based on qualitative or quantitative data are regarded equally; different approaches and new proposals are particularly welcome.

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Language

Abstracts and papers must be submitted **exclusively in English** (American English, translated or revised by a native speaker or professional in translation). If deemed appropriate by the Author(s), the same work may also be presented **eventually in a second language** among those admitted by the Journal (French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish).

Deadline and Timeline for Abstract / Paper Submission

The selection process for the Special Issue will follow the schedule below:

- Deadline for Abstract Submissions: July, 20th 2026
- Deadline for Paper Submissions: September, 30th 2026
- Publication of the Special Issue: December 2026

As regards the Submission phases, the detailed instructions and deadline are indicated on the Home Page of the Journal's website, and in the specific section "**New announcements**": portusplus.org/index.php/pp/announcement. The works deemed suitable and in line with the standards of the Journal are subjected to a double-blind peer review process (neither the Authors nor the Reviewers know the identity of each other) to avoid bias in the evaluation.

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More information <[Publication Schedule](#)>

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The contributions are evaluated on the basis of specific criteria (originality of approach and methodology; scientific-academic level; quality and clarity of content; completeness and order of presentation; importance in disciplinary sector; scope of application of results; contribution to the international debate, illustrations, references; etc.), relying on competence and experience of Reviewers in thematic fields of interest for the Journal.

The papers are published according to the experts' suggestions after a high-quality and independent revision, supporting the Author(s) in the finalizing of the text, in order to increase the scientific relevance of the published articles.

More information <[Peer Review Process](#)> and <[Information for Reviewers](#)>

Publication of Selected Papers

In accordance with the recommendations of the Reviewers, the papers will be selected by the Editors and published on **PORTUSplus** with the **ISSN code (2039-6422)**, the International Standard Serial Number which uniquely identifies a serial publication.

The articles are published, after the review and copy-editing process is completed, as part of a single issue of the Journal, accompanied by a table of contents. All editorial processes aimed at publication are provided by the Journal Editor free of charge, with the valuable collaboration of the Editorial Team.

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(* Project Framework & Acknowledgments

The Port-clUster LandScapE: Developing a Spatial and Design Approach to Port Clusters (acronym PULSE) has been a bi-annual research project (2022/2024) aimed at studying the spatial, urban and architectural impacts related to the clustering phenomenon in contemporary European ports.

Winner of the Young Researchers Notice, PULSE has received funding from the Italian Ministry of University and Research (MUR), as part of the implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), within the Next Generation EU Recovery Package. The Notice was aimed at supporting the research activities of young researchers who have been awarded the Seal of Excellence (SoE) following their participation in the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellowships call under the Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe Framework Programmes.

PULSE has been implemented between 2022 and 2024 at the University of Genoa, Italy, within the Department of Architecture and Design (DAD) which acted as Host Institution.

PULSE Official Webpage: <https://pulse.unige.it/>
