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# Transportation Research Part A

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/tra](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/tra)

## Marketing strategies of Port Authorities: A multi-dimensional theorisation

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Port Authority  
Port marketing  
Strategic business areas

### ABSTRACT

The study advances an innovative conceptualization of the marketing strategies developed by Port Authorities (PAs), framing a relevant case of hybrid organisation into a business marketing perspective. PAs have transformed to hybrid organizations mostly disassociated from operational activities and port services provision. Still, they maintain a key role as managing bodies advancing the prospects of respective port and associate clusters. Marketing is among the functions working towards this end. Aiming to advance theoretical constructs and related empirical research, the paper employs business marketing perspectives and their applications in hybrid organisations to introduce a novel conceptualization of PA marketing strategies. Within this theoretical angle, the study builds a multi-dimensional framework on PA strategic positioning that combines (a) PAs' marketing objectives in various Strategic Business Areas (SBAs), (b) the multi-faceted geography of the targeted salient stakeholders, and (c) the induced portfolio of marketing actions, whose ramifications unveil virtuous cross-fertilization effects (CFEs) and fuel the success of PA marketing strategies. This model enables to identify five different patterns of market coverage across diverse SBAs.

### 1. Introduction

The evolution of clusters transformed modern ports to multi-actors arenas and induced a redefinition of the role of each stakeholder involved (Monios and Wilmsmeier, 2012; Dooms et al., 2013a). Port Authorities (PAs) are not an exemption. Following a wave of port devolution in the 1990s (Brooks and Cullinane, 2007), they stand today among the heterogeneous class of institutions commonly labelled as *hybrid organisations* acting in the intersection of the public and private domains (Koppell, 2006).

Neither this standing, nor the inextricably linked disassociation of PAs from operational activities and services provision, relegates them to a secondary role. On the contrary, competing governance frameworks, specialization, the battle for increasing served throughput, and the interest in transforming hinterland economic conditions, are all factors leading PAs to a more active role. Contextual changes - such as the move of production-distribution-consumption networks towards post-fordist methods and embeddedness in supply chains - call for additional managerial and governance practices (cf. Woo et al., 2011). A growing competition among ports and institutional pressures add to the tendency of PAs to pursue more ambitious objectives. Scholars observe a "renaissance of PAs" (Verhoeven, 2010, 2015) that go "beyond the landlord" functions (de Langen and van der Lugt, 2006) and act as "port cluster managers" (de Langen and Visser, 2005) that advance the prospects of the respective port. In retrospect, the key

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tra.2018.03.012>

Received 31 August 2016; Received in revised form 27 January 2018; Accepted 7 March 2018

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strategic dimensions of PAs gain further attention (cf. contributions in: Brooks and Pallis, 2013; Brooks et al., 2017).

Marketing is among these “beyond the landlord” functions. A fact-finding report that surveyed PAs in Europe revealed that 81% lead promotion and marketing activities (ESPO, 2016). A study of 70 cruise ports in the Mediterranean Sea found that 71.4% of the PAs are leaders of port marketing (MedCruise, 2016).

Scholarly research strived to identify the factors that contribute to the respective marketing and communication strategies (Pando et al., 2005; Cahoon, 2007; Parola et al., 2013b). Still, the examination of questions of significance is found wanted: the heterogeneity and ontological variety of the targeted stakeholders, the marketing actions that might contribute to the creation and co-creation of value for involved stakeholders, and the variance of the value proposition(s) that any given port might offer, call for theory building and research on the details of PAs marketing strategies.

In this study, theoretical arguments are derived from existing academic research, conjugating marketing with port management literature. Theory has been corroborated by the empirical support of broad qualitative evidence from the field. Over the last ten years, the authors undertook numerous visits, studied, interacted, and interviewed senior managers (i.e., Presidents, CEOs, Marketing Directors, etc.) at more than 50 PAs across all continents. In particular, some ports offered unique insights for addressing marketing-related topics and refining theoretical arguments. These ports, regardless their size of geographic origin, unveiled a special and pioneering attitude to pursue marketing actions with success (e.g., Rotterdam, New York-New Jersey, Shanghai, Piraeus, Genoa, Dubai, etc.). Moreover, we draw on empirical evidence on marketing and promotion activities of European ports that have been reported in two fact finding reports as regards the strategies of 86 PAs, that represent over 200 ports and more than 57% of the overall cargo handled in Europe (ESPO, 2016), and the strategies of 70 cruise ports that represent over 100 ports in the Mediterranean and its adjoining seas (MedCruise, 2016) respectively.

Targeting to fill this research gap, the present study introduces the theorisations of marketing approach in hybrid organisations to the case of PAs. Based on a business marketing perspective, the study builds a multi-dimensional framework on PA strategic positioning that combines (a) the *spectrum of marketing objectives* regarding different, but closely interlinked, strategic business areas (SBAs), and (b) the *multi-faceted geography* of the targeted salient stakeholders. The integration of these elements with (c) the “*ramified*” *portfolio of associated marketing actions* results in a three-dimensional construct that unveils virtuous *cross-fertilization effects* (CFEs) fuelling the success of marketing strategies in modern PAs. This original model enables to identify five different patterns of strategic positioning of a PA.

## 2. Port Authorities: Hybrid organisations engaged in marketing strategies

PAs maintain today a dominant position in port governance and organisation. These are entities offering multi-faceted strategic guidance in port development, with the content and formulation process of their strategies being increasingly in line with managerial thinking and a private-oriented logic (van der Lugt et al., 2013). Reformed governance settings stimulate PAs to undertake growth strategies and explore new business opportunities (Cheon et al., 2010). This is a search for expanding port reputation and visibility, as well as for the reinforcement of the relationships with those salient stakeholders capable to influence the success of the port.

In this framework, PAs jockey to achieve broader objectives and strengthen functions that in the past sounded unconventional for a public institution. Marketing and communication, ICT development, and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) are among them (Parola et al., 2013b). Corporate social responsibility activities are more evident than ever (Acciaro, 2015). As is the launch of projects and investments in overseas countries, which are seen as additional source of revenue and an opportunity for exploiting the resources and capabilities developed at home (Dooms et al., 2013a). Being network-embedded entities, PAs also act as “public” entrepreneurs actively committed in logistics projects outside their physical edges, for reinforcing commodity supply chains and their own competitiveness (Rodrigue and Notteboom, 2009).

The blurring of public and private boundaries via the juxtaposition of a market-driven orientation with traditional public oriented tasks is not a unique ‘port’ phenomenon. Public reform programs have altered the nature of several public organisations in service sectors in a number of countries, fuelling the establishment (and renewing interest in the analysis) of ‘hybrid organisations’.

Hybrid organisations are institutions in which governance is among the key ontological dimensions modelling their mixed nature (cf. Hasenfeld and Gidron, 2005; Cooney, 2006). As Powell’s (1990) underlined, hybrid organizational forms combine factors of markets (e.g. competitiveness), hierarchies (e.g. control mechanisms), and networks (e.g. interdependence). Through these multiple managerial forms, scholars suggest that they have a better potential to adapt to changing business environments than traditional firms (for a literature review on hybrid organisations: Billis, 2010). According to Jay (2013), these are polyhedral institutions, which deal with a variety of stakeholder interests; thus, they need to conjugate internal identities (Kraatz and Block, 2008) with external demands (Pache and Santos, 2010).

This picture, along with their role as orchestrator in business networks that moderate conflicts among private firms and advance inter-organizational relationships leads to the justifiable advocacy of conceptualising PAs as typical hybrid organisations (cf. Verhoeven, 2010; van der Lugt et al., 2013, 2015). As the study of hybrid organisations suggests (cf. Courpasson and Dany, 2003; Skelcher et al., 2005), the presence of such organisations and not least the way they act have different implications for particular sectors.

In this vein, like all hybrid organisations (Zontanos and Anderson, 2004), PA stands as the alternative structure for managing marketing relationships to compete with the dominant economic models of markets. The erosion of competitive advantages traditionally ensured by monopolistic positions of ports, forces PAs to strive in a new, turbulent, market environment of fierce competition. The implementation of marketing strategies emerges as key lever to compete and achieve long-term growth. When such PA marketing actions are not effective, ports are probably unable to cope with additional demands (Cahoon, 2007).

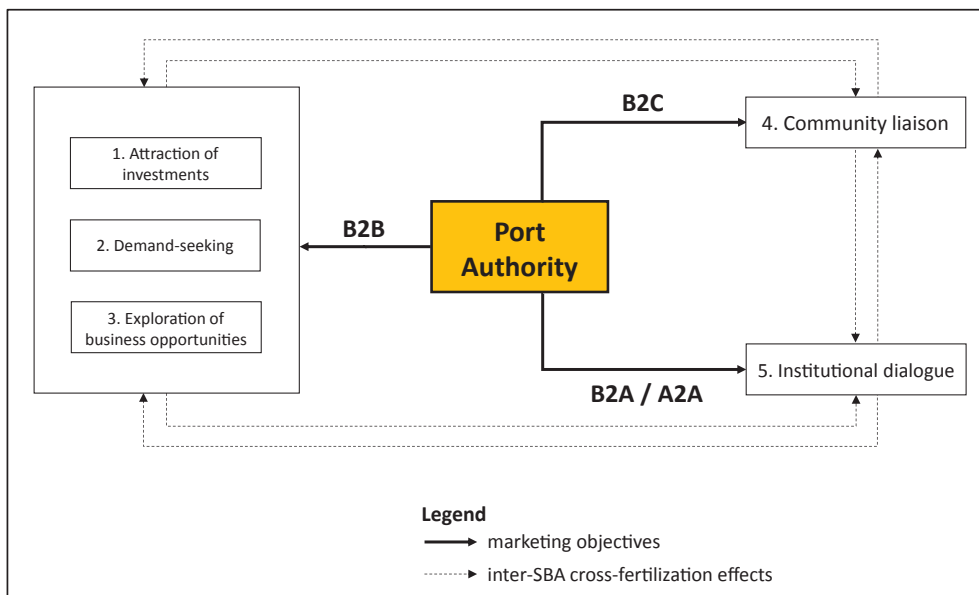
In addition, the evolving port strategy making imposes a need for conceptualising PAs marketing functions in a context of multi-port gateway regions (Notteboom, 2010). Due to foreland and landside port regionalisation (i.e. the functional and spatial expansion of individual ports - Notteboom and Rodrigue, 2005), PAs deal with a rising number of public and private (international) actors and have to manage more intense and sophisticated interactions (Satta et al., 2014). Thus, their marketing strategies are called to address a variety of stakeholders and generate relationships of complex nature and content.

Eventually, scholars started recognising marketing as a core function of seaport management, emphasising its positive impact on PA cash flow, profits, production levels, market share, and overall image (Mester, 1991; Branch, 1986, 1998; Figwer, 1999; Cahoon and Hecker, 2005; Pando et al., 2005; Cahoon and Notteboom, 2008). Most studies emphasise the role of (various forms of) communication, trade and business development, local community liaison, and Customer Relationship Management (CRM), as major components of the overall marketing effort (Cahoon, 2007; Parola et al., 2013b).

Following a business marketing perspective, however, the strategic management of inter-organizational relationships goes well beyond the traditional PA activities in the port community. According to Anderson et al. (2006), a successful marketing strategy focuses on identifying the key business relationships (Dyer and Singh, 1998; Morgan and Hunt, 1999) through which a PA can deliver superior value to (internal and external) stakeholders, based on its distinctive competencies. This constitutes a starting point to build value constellations (Normann and Ramirez, 1993) for achieving competitive advantages contextually based on a market-driven approach and co-production processes (Etgar, 2008).

This conceptualisation calls for an understanding of the objectives of PAs marketing actions and the value they imply for specific salient stakeholders. Marketing strategies are designed to profile, communicate and deliver “stakeholder value propositions” for the key social and economic actors belonging to the network (Ballantyne et al., 2011). These propositions are platforms of value creation. They built through resources integration within stakeholder systems, in which value configuration plays a coordinating role among business players. On these grounds, marketing develops in relation to customers but also in relation to other stakeholders. Scholars evaluate communication (Kaplan and Norton, 2001), supply chain coordination (Bechtel and Jayaram, 1997), attraction of employees (Gowan, 2004), whereas others (cf. Frow and Payne, 2011) analyse the role of every stakeholder in creating value for customers and co-creating value for themselves (for an application of the value co-creation concept in ports: Vitsounis and Pallis, 2012).

Marketing actions are associated with the offering of value to each stakeholder category. At the very same moment, the “targets” of PA marketing initiatives do not just behave as passive stakeholders simply constituting a direct or indirect revenue stream. In many cases, the counterparts of PA marketing actions are interdependent stakeholders able to co-create value with the PA for the entire business ecosystem reinforcing port competitiveness (De Martino and Morvillo, 2008).



Source: authors' own elaboration.

Fig. 1. The categories of PA marketing objectives in the different SBAs.

Source: authors' own elaboration.

### 3. Key dimensions of marketing strategies

#### 3.1. Marketing objectives

Responding to the changing environment, PAs pursue a heterogeneous spectrum of marketing objectives. The scope of PA marketing encompasses five mainstream categories of objectives regarding different yet closely interlinked SBAs (Fig. 1). Three of them refer to Business-to-Business (B2B) relations (Objectives 1–3). Another objective lays in the SBA of Business-to-Community (B2C) relationships (Objective 4). A fifth one refers to both Business-to-Administration (B2A) and Administration-to-Administration (A2A) relations (Objective 5). A PA may generate cross-fertilization effects (CFEs) that materialise due to the synergies and economies of scope in committing resources and capabilities to marketing actions. The marketing objectives of various SBAs are mutually and inextricably linked, whereas marketing actions are often required to support each other, for achieving objectives that, despite appearances, are not stand-alone. In hybrid organisations, as modern PAs are, strategic marketing objectives are profoundly interlaced and their conjoint achievement often generates win-win or lose-lose games with stakeholders.

A first PA marketing objective is to secure suitable endowments in order to enhance the competitiveness of the port in a fast-changing environment. The demand of upgraded and modernised infra- and supra-structures, the availability of advanced ICT systems, and the provision of fast and reliable operational performances are considerable (Tongzon and Heng, 2005; Gong et al., 2012), especially as economies of scale in different port markets (i.e. gigantism of container and cruise vessels) results in various dimensions of port operations, and a quest for more advanced supply chains and logistics. Yet, the mobilisation of third parties to invest should not be taken for granted. Part of marketing strategies is therefore devoted to attract salient B2B stakeholders, e.g. investors, logistics and industrial firms (Parola et al., 2013a), which bring financial, technical and human resources, and potential organisational and managerial capabilities to ensure a high service quality (Objective 1). The role of the corporatized Port of Rotterdam authority in securing long-term investors in the operation of (parts) of the major port expansion in Northern Europe (Maasvlakte II) is one of such examples, when nearly three quarters of European PAs are responsible for proceeding autonomously in identifying investors and manage the related concessions (ESPO, 2010). Despite the progressive privatisation of port terminals that accelerated the commitment of private firms in commercial operations and attracted considerable (inward) investments from overseas (Notteboom et al., 2012; Panayides et al., 2015), additional investments are essential in order to better integrate the services provided by individual entities, facilitate the clustering of the latter, or provide auxiliary infrastructures. Such investments reinforce port performance, reputation and, ultimately, competitiveness.

A second major objective of PA marketing looks to enhance additional demand for the port (Objective 2). Demand refers to cargo and/or passenger volumes, in turn boosted by the presence of superior hinterland and maritime connectivity (for cargo ports: Notteboom and Rodrigue, 2005; Parola and Sciomachen, 2009; Van den Berg and de Langen, 2011; for passenger ports: Vaggelas and Pallis, 2010). Given the ‘terminalisation’ of operations (Olivier and Slack, 2006), different settings exist and thus the precise nature of the ‘demand seeking’ PA strategy is detailed accordingly. For example, PAs of Mediterranean ports work collectively in Asia aiming to generate demand source markets for cruising. Notably, PAs are leaders in such marketing activities even in those ports that have concessioned terminal operations (i.e. Naples, Malta, Barcelona, Cyprus). In the case of cargo ports, an illustrative example are the PAs of the biggest three European ports (i.e. Rotterdam, Antwerp, Hamburg) are active in overseas markets aiming to bring cargo traffic to the ports they govern.

In the case of a landlord framework, PAs do not have a direct contractual relation with ocean carriers, thus marketing is somewhat mediated by other business players such as terminal operators and freight forwarders. In such ports, PAs do not undertake stevedoring or other handling operations and avoid commercial risk. Nonetheless, their role in attracting B2B demand is relevant, as PA managers often interact with carriers and other players affecting cargo “trajectory” (cf. an analysis of such practices in the container ports of Antwerp and Rotterdam in: Vitsounis and Pallis, 2012), or cruise vessels deployment (e.g., the periodical meetings that cruise ports in Europe organise with cruise lines twice per year via their associations - MedCruise and Cruise Europe - aiming to secure favourable deployment of cruise vessels). The PA intervention aims to “trace back” cargo flows along the logistics chain and to perform multi-faceted marketing actions that assume a direct/indirect or a formal/informal connotation (Notteboom et al., 2013). Primarily, the PA acts as the orchestrator that, via B2B relationships, closes the gap between the service providers and the potential users of the respective services. It might also generate knowledge on which conditions are seen to be the ones securing a vibrant business environment, i.e. the available services, levels of efficiency, lower costs than competitors, etc. (Tovar and Wall, 2015).

The presence of dedicated terminals, i.e. terminals run by a terminal operator and used by a sole ocean carrier alone (or alliance), provides a different setting requiring an objective refinement. Once the ‘demand’ for operating one such terminal is secured (i.e. operator and user are in place), the PA marketing is rather ‘landside’ oriented, aiming to make the demand for the operation (i.e. by end-users, logistics, value-added services and logistics, communities, etc.) sustainable.

Given the above, PA marketing actions will be really successful if the marketing activities of terminal operators or shipping lines are aligned each other for value co-creation. A PA can spend enormous amounts of money on marketing but, if terminal operators or shipping lines do not perform well, PA actions will not have the aimed effect. This means that the PA is very dependent on the performance and marketing activities of its own customers. For this reason, the selection of reliable terminal operators as concessionaires constitutes a relevant pre-condition for attracting demand.

These two main marketing objectives are strongly interdependent and may produce synergies. A successful attraction of investments and resources creates pre-conditions for a competitive port, with a solid market reputation and capabilities to deliver reliable services. In turn, a port that generates growing traffic volumes is considered attractive by port operators and draws the attention of business and financial players seeking investment opportunities in logistics facilities. A combined achievement of such

objectives generates win-win synergies feeding a “virtuous cycle” which reinforces the B2B positioning of the PA.

In addition, PAs are tempted to catch-up other business opportunities in areas that go beyond their core objectives (Objective 3), which are the handling and serving of cargoes/passengers in the port zone and the adjacent areas. Here the reference is not only to logistics and supply chain integration (e.g., Rotterdam, Barcelona, etc.), but also to ship-repairing or hotel management (e.g., the new master plan of Piraeus). Such emerging initiatives are strategically related to the more traditional PA marketing objectives (Objectives 1 and 2) but take place by comparative uncommon strategies that exploit the resources and capabilities cumulated in mainstream activities.

This exploitation might take place by using in-house agglomerated expertise, capabilities and resources. For instance, the capabilities developed with (foreign) bidders in tendering procedures, stimulate the accumulation of managerial and relational skills, which might be monetized by providing consultancy services to other PAs (see the Rotterdam case: [Dooms et al., 2013b](#)). In this perspective, PAs perform a sound process of internationalisation grounded on deployment of managerial and financial resources ([De Souza et al., 2003](#); [Wang et al., 2004](#)), so as to: (i) “sell the port” worldwide (customers-seeking principle); (ii) keep control over the international logistics networks that a given port forms part of (efficiency and effectiveness principle); and (iii) gain benefits for the organisation, such as revenue streams, incremental knowledge, cutting-edge technologies, and attractive business opportunities (competitive advantage principle) ([Dooms et al., 2013c](#)). The port of Antwerp has developed strategies of this nature with ports in America (Montreal, Panama Canal Authority), Africa (San Pedro), and Asia (Jawaharal Nehru Port Trust; Essar Ports, in India), while in Europe Rotterdam PA is also active in different continents, Hamburg is working towards this end in the US and Bremerhaven does so within Europe (for details: [Pallis and Kladaki, 2016](#)).

This way PAs gain visibility and economic benefits and support core marketing objectives such as the attraction of investments and demand-seeking. Other PAs’ investments in building new port-related business, i.e. the creation and shareholding of inland terminals, and the provision of value added services and logistics, are in several cases driven by exploration of market opportunities, while they serve the smoothness of port operations.

Besides B2B marketing objectives, environmental complexity and spatial issues trigger PAs to support the contribution of the port to the adjacent community via the establishment of a trustworthy relation with its local stakeholders. This leads to the deployment of Business-to-Community (B2C) marketing strategies. As a paradox, the building of solid community liaisons with the societal backyard (Objective 4) is increasingly necessary in internationalised ports, where the disconnection between global (business-driven) ambitions and local interests becomes critical ([Cahoon, 2007](#); [Verhoeven, 2010](#)). PAs are called to promote the related port by effectively communicating with the main stakeholders of the local community. The purpose of such B2C promotional activities is to make population aware of the beneficial presence of the port, projecting an appropriate image to the society ([ESPO, 2010](#); [Parola et al., 2013a](#)). B2C marketing strategies build consensus and trust of citizens and local economic clusters on port planning, securing the satisfactory co-existence and coherent co-development of urban and port spaces. The most indicative example is the establishment of the annual award of ‘societal integration’ established by the European Sea Ports Organisation (ESPO) in the 2000s, that in 2017 only saw 13 PAs detailing their activities in the field (i.e., Antwerp, Naestved, Tallinn, Brest, Guadeloupe, North Adriatic Sea ports, Oslo, Szczecin and

Swinoujscie PA, Koper, Malaga, Santander, British Ports Association, and London). Ports from all over the globe have also established AIVP, the International Association of Ports and Cities, aiming to collectively promote the presence of such marketing activities, establishing among others ‘port centres’ to effectively communicate with the local community.

Finally, PAs are hybrid organisations involved in a “dual” dialogue with public administrations (Objective 5). In fact, most PAs interact with such players both in business contexts as entrepreneurs (B2A) and across the institutional chain as administrators devoted to port affairs (A2A). Smoothing relationships with public administrations is a fundamental business marketing “building block” that, *inter alia*, enhances the establishment of solid community liaisons (see: Objective 4). For keeping the pace of port and business development, PAs have to efficiently deal with political and administrative counterparts at various levels. They do so working either alone, collectively via local initiatives, or via their associations at national level (e.g. American Association of Port Authorities – AAPA in the US; Assoport in Italy; ELIME in Greece; Cruise Norway), regionally (e.g. ESPO; Cruise Europe; MedCruise) or internationally (e.g. AIVP). This is not least because port devolution drove to a multi-scalar governance framework transforming centralized port planning to locally-embedded forms of governance ([Baltazar and Brooks, 2006](#); [Jacobs and Notteboom, 2011](#)). The “centrifugal” forces delocalizing governance to local PAs impose new institutional frameworks based on dialectic B2A relationships ([Ng and Pallis, 2010](#); [van der Lugt et al., 2014](#)).

Generating balance within a given institutional architecture is tuning the decisions of public administrators (A2A) with the evolving needs of private firms ([Parola and Maugeri, 2013](#)). In this regard, vertical and horizontal coordination with (other) public organisations enables to deal with key issues such as: (i) port planning and development; (ii) port reform and regulatory implementation; (iii) execution of administrative and business decisions; and (iv) implementation of political actions ([Caballini et al., 2009](#)). Vertical coordination refers to fruitful institutional dialogue and distribution of competences between PAs and public actors, such as municipality, region and various ministers ([Brooks and Pallis, 2011](#)). Horizontal coordination, instead, requires a sound and integrated dialogue among PAs in the prioritisation of investments and in the avoidance of overcapacity concerns in port planning ([Notteboom et al., 2009](#)). These dialogues generate lobbying effects and exert political pressure to raise additional funding, moderate conflicts with the local community, and obtain a fast-track approval of key projects.

### 3.2. Stakeholders targeted by Port Authorities

PAs deal with a multitude of public and private stakeholders. Contextual changes have induced a multitude of these stakeholders



**Table 1**

Stakeholder categories targeted by the PA.

Source: authors' elaboration inspired by [Henesey et al. \(2003\)](#), [Dooms et al. \(2013c\)](#).

B2B stakeholders	B2C stakeholders
Concessionaires (terminals, industrial sites, logistics facilities, etc.)	Citizens & societal groups of interest
Feeder carriers	Employees and labor unions
Foreland port & logistics players	Financial and banking institutions
Foreland port authorities	Port-induced economic activities (manufacturing, tourism, other service industries, etc.)
Inland terminals	Private/public foundations
Intermediate hubs	Tourists and passengers
Logistics operators & auxiliary service providers in the cluster	Trade associations (logistics, inland transport, tourism, etc.)
Marinas	
Ocean carriers (container, ro-ro, bulk, cruise, etc.)	B2A/A2A stakeholders
Port service providers (ancillary services, Coast Guard, Customs, etc.)	Governmental institutions (Ministries, Embassies, trade and investment agencies, etc.)
Ports in proximity	Chambers of Commerce
Road, rail and barge operators	Multilateral support institutions (EIB, etc.)
Shippers (foreland)	Municipalities
Shippers (hinterland)	Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)
Tour operators, tourism-related & entertainment firms, etc.	Regional and provincial government

to exercise a “multi-directional” influence on PAs action and *vice versa*, heavily impacting port competitiveness and success ([Verhoeven, 2010](#)). This influence originates from the pressure of market players and/or societal groups and the quality of interactions with the government and local administrations. In this regard, PAs are hybrid organisation that address special challenges related to some, or more, categories of stakeholders that are dispersed over a wide geographic space. This interplay between PA and stakeholders assume an unprecedented intensity, frequency, and geographical complexity ([Parola et al., 2013a](#)).

Marketing strategies developed by PAs deal with intricate networks of stakeholders, the members of which are categorised in three groups ([Table 1](#)). The first one is business-related stakeholders (e.g., shipping lines, shippers, terminal operators, logistics and forwarding companies, transport services providers, etc.). These are market players affecting (and be affected by) PA strategies in the pursuit of B2B marketing objectives. The second category includes societal groups and local communities seeking a sustainable port growth in harmony with the territory and its citizens. Finally, institutional stakeholders are involved in meaningful interactions with PAs on matters linked to several policy issues, legislative interventions, and public interests. Each stakeholder represents a ‘target’ of marketing activities, whereas groups of the latter (portfolios of marketing actions) head to achieve specific marketing objective(s).

With marketing objectives closely interconnected, the interplays developed between PAs and each of these groups might have implications for/in a different SBA (i.e., B2B, B2C, B2A & A2A) comparing to what the “natural” geographic and functional positioning of each stakeholder would imply. At the same time, any given stakeholder might be involved as co-creator in marketing actions in any of the defined market areas.

The borderless nature of modern supply chains has its own implications. First, it is hardly the case that actors operate or develop alone within the port cluster. Irrespective of size, the bundling of operations and the clustering of activities, means that facing of related issues by endorsing a “collective action’ logic is essential, irrespective of the market niche that reference is made ([Zhang and Lam, 2016](#)). Second, even though PAs are physically bounded in their own territory and space, they deal with players situated in distant and multiple locations and want to influence their behaviour and generate business opportunities. This takes place regardless any physically limited extension of port operations or the intrinsic normative limitations of PAs jurisdiction. Third, to add complexity to this picture, it is worth to note the “fuzzy” geography of the decisional chains of some stakeholders, such as multinational corporations, who might interact with PAs through multiple and hierarchized decisional units based in geographically distant locations. The existence of multi-layered decisional units (i.e., local offices, national branches, regional and global headquarters) complicates marketing interactions, given the involvement of diverse representatives within the same multinational corporation. Fourth, marketing has reference to actors with diverse cultural backgrounds as well as economic and institutional environments. Such diversity might generate problems of market adaptation and make the dialogue with stakeholders less fruitful and constructive.

### 3.3. Marketing actions

By adopting a market-driven approach, a given PA provides various marketing solutions for each stakeholder in the port community, starting from its latent needs. Following evaluation of the internal strengths, the competitors, the business ecosystem and the social community, the endorsed marketing strategies activate a portfolio of actions based on the capabilities of the PA. Marketing is the process of defining, developing, and delivering a superior value to stakeholders (in B2B, B2C, B2A/A2A market areas) depending on distinctive competencies. Endorsing the terminology of constructs developed in marketing research ([Vargo and Lusch, 2008, 2011](#); [Ballantyne et al., 2011](#); [Ford, 2011](#)), PAs define “stakeholder value propositions” (i.e. offer platforms to create and/or co-create value within the port community) via actions that might relate to one or more marketing processes aiming to (i) define the value (e.g. identifying the needs, positioning the offers, etc.); (ii) provide the value (e.g. products/services development, defining the price,

selecting and chose the distribution channels, etc.); and (c) communicate the value (e.g. sales force messages, promotion, advertising, PR, media planning, etc.) respectively.

The potential value for stakeholders that is generated through marketing efforts develops in line with the main functions that the PA undertakes, i.e. landlord, regulator, operator, or community manager. Evaluating the traditional functions of PAs, Verhoeven (2010) observes that the operator function has shifted towards aspects of the landlord and regulator ones, as well as towards the new function known as “cluster” manager (de Langen, 2004). The latter is strongly related to the changing nature of port communities and the relevant role assumed by associated stakeholders, such as the local communities. Consequently, the spectrum of marketing actions is currently profiled to interact with a variety of stakeholders, consistent with recent port governance trends.

In this regard, PA marketing managers define value propositions aiming to promote superior experiences to their targets, while developing sustainable marketing relationships. Marketing efforts are devoted to several actions - with the PAs offering to port stakeholders technical, economic and/or social benefits, based on competitive elements that are perceived to be similar (i.e. points of parity) or superior (i.e. points of difference) to the best alternative (Keller, 2003; Hutt and Speh, 2008).

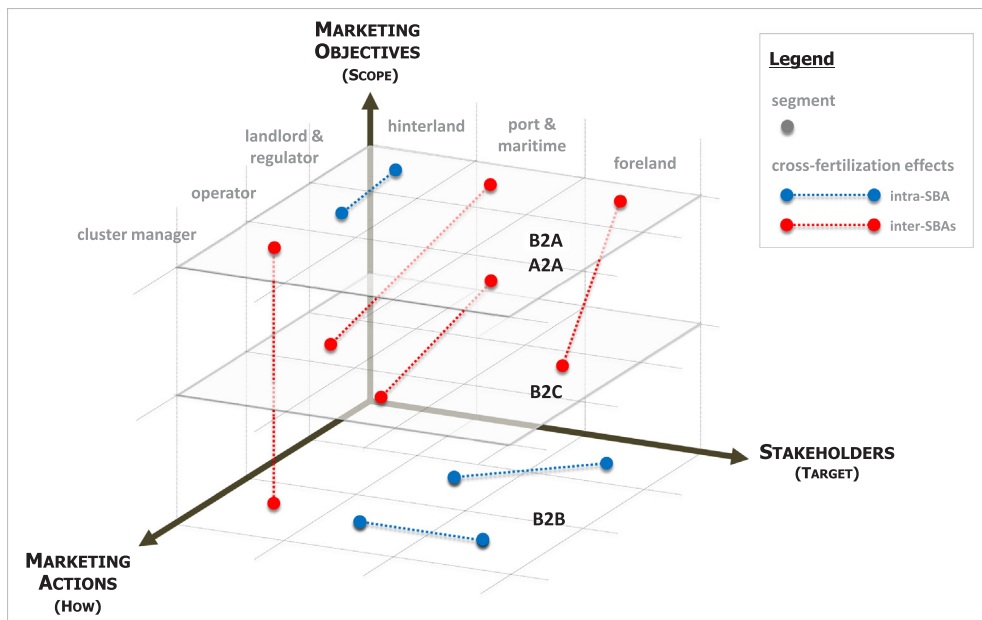
#### 4. Strategic marketing options for Port Authorities: A multi-dimensional theorisation

Being institutions of hybrid nature, PAs are called to achieve broad strategic objectives conjugating the pursuit of public and societal goals with the adoption of B2B marketing behaviours (Hasenfeld and Gidron, 2005; Cooney, 2006). To theorise the implied strategic marketing options we build a three-dimensional model based on (a) the PA marketing objectives in the different SBAs, (b) the targeted salient stakeholders, and (c) the ramified portfolio of associated marketing actions. The integration of these elements enables to understand the breadth of the strategic marketing positioning of PAs in each SBA.

##### 4.1. Analytical dimensions for segmentation

Fig. 2 outlines a three-layered framework capturing the complex design of a PA marketing positioning in different yet interlinked SBAs. On the vertical axis we draw three layers corresponding to the SBAs in which such hybrid organisation may pursue its marketing objectives, i.e. Business-to-Business (B2B), Business-to-Community (B2C), and Business-to-Administration (B2A)/Administration-to-Administration (A2A). Each layer combines two other dimensions, namely stakeholders targeted and marketing actions respectively. The combination of all three dimensions enables to identify potential target segments for the PA. A segment consists of a group of stakeholders who share a similar set of needs and wants, and who can be reached via a similar marketing action.

To ground this conceptualization on solid theoretical underpinnings, the key analytical dimensions of stakeholders and marketing actions are framed into the theory of the “renaissance” of PAs, developed by Verhoeven (2010). This approach grounds on the transformations taking shape in the management and governance of PAs, and details the new functions and the wider geographic focus of their activities. More recently, Verhoeven (2015) demonstrated an ontological nexus between the capacity of PA to re-interpret these functions, following innovative managerial paradigms and the associated expansion of the geographic perimeter of its



Source: authors' own elaboration.

Fig. 2. The multi-dimensional framework.

Source: authors' own elaboration.

jurisdiction. Our theorisation is nourished by these constructs as they permit to meaningfully categorise stakeholders and endorsed marketing actions.

#### 4.1.1. Expanding the boundaries of PA jurisdiction: The geography of stakeholders targeted

Modern ports are value-adding transfer points embedded in broader systems and having specific spatial and functional characteristics. The port, its foreland, and its hinterland are closely bound in a symbiotic relationship. To capture this reality, the proposed model incorporates the concept “triptych foreland-port-hinterland” (Charlier, 1982) that accentuates the spatial and functional ties of a PA with its stakeholders - not surprisingly, the regional-hinterland level has already attracted academic interest, fostering the proliferation of the “multi-port gateway region” construct as a unit of analysis (see: Notteboom, 2010).

Marketing strategies present managerial concerns, as the multi-faceted “geography” of stakeholders in various SBAs expands well beyond port physical boundaries. This expansion is a reflection of the growing spatial complexity of logistics and supply chain operations. It is also a cause of more intense competition in attracting cargo volumes and investments. Marketing efforts developed by PAs are increasingly complex and require the commitment of specialised and highly qualified managers. In so doing, PAs interact with players having diverse legal nature (e.g., public bodies, public companies, private companies, individual citizens, trade associations, etc.), interests (private vs. public), geographic location and strategic ambitions (local, national, international).

The changing geography of cargo demand results from the combined behaviour of a number of stakeholders capable of affecting cargo pathway (cargo “routers”). The PA has to follow cargo transportation routes along the maritime logistics chain and interact with those players capable to define the trajectory. Consequently, in recent times PAs expanded the geographic scope of their marketing functions, as they identified target players and value co-creators in distant locations. Having to deal with such variety of stakeholders across the foreland-port-hinterland continuum, PAs make direct investments, and/or facilitate the development of strategic partnerships with inland ports, dry ports and other PAs (Notteboom and Rodrigue, 2005; Estache and Trujillo, 2009).

In Fig. 2, the axis of targeted stakeholders is split into three parts according to their geography, i.e. hinterland, port and maritime networks, and foreland.

#### 4.1.2. From traditional to new PA functions: The emergence of marketing actions

The suggested conceptualisation captures the newness of PA marketing attitudes that stimulates market-driven strategic actions. In this respect, the theory of PA “renaissance” enriches the taxonomy of PA functions building a matrix that combines these functions with the diverse existential options suggested by Heaver et al. (2000). The resulting three hypothetical typologies of PA differ in terms of managerial intent and marketing attitudes.

A PA might be a “conservator”, that is a good housekeeper of port spaces and resources but essentially sticks to a passive and mechanistic implementation of basic PA functions. Conversely, a “facilitator” PA profiles itself as a mediator and matchmaker between economic and societal interests; hence, the extensive cluster manager function. Acting as facilitator the PA develops a stronger B2B attitude and conscious marketing ambitions, targeting stakeholders both within and beyond the port physical boundaries. The third alternative is the most advanced managerial model of the “entrepreneur” PA. This model blends the main features of the facilitator with a more outspoken commercial attitude of investor, service provider, and potentially consultant, across the hinterland-foreland continuum.

The aforementioned functions incorporate different actions in various marketing areas. The traditional landlord and regulator functions are fulfilled in a more agile and smart way, heading to business opportunities and the establishment of sound economic habitats for stakeholders (Paixão and Marlow, 2003; Chlomoudis et al., 2003). Corresponding marketing actions relate to the awarding of terminal concessions, the planning and realisation of port infrastructures, the scouting of private and public funding, the provision of economic and fiscal incentives, and so on.

The operator function experiences a functionally and geographically broad service portfolio. Related examples of marketing actions include the selling of services (e.g., stevedoring, ancillary, and consultancy) and direct investments in assets/activities outside port borders (hinterland and foreland). The PA also exploits the capabilities developed at home to engage in internationalisation strategies.

Finally, sophisticated supply chains drive PAs to increasingly assume the role of the cluster manager (de Langen, 2004). This mostly coordinating function aims to resolve collective action problems that occur within and outside the port area, such as hinterland bottlenecks, training and education, ICT, marketing and promotion, innovation and internationalisation (van der Horst and de Langen, 2008). PAs that are heavily committed in these tasks seek to create additional value for the entire population of stakeholders, regardless geographic location. In this respect, a PA undertakes marketing activities such as the stipulation of cooperative agreements in logistics networks, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) actions, disclosure of salient topics to stakeholders (reporting), above-the-line (ATL) and below-the line (BTL) promotion, and the establishment of foreign representative offices.

In retrospect, in Fig. 2, the axis of marketing actions is divided into three parts, consistent with the incorporated “traditional” (i.e. landlord and regulator), “operator”, and “cluster manager” PA functions.

## 4.2. Cross-fertilisation effects and “ramified” portfolio of marketing actions

The proposed model enables to identify in each SBA the different market segments that result from the combinations of stakeholders targeted and the set of marketing actions used for interacting with them. This modelling conceptualises the presence of a number of segments in a variety of SBAs. Following evaluation of the structural attractiveness of each segment, the PA can potentially select any of them as the targeted one and then serve it via suitable marketing actions. For this purpose, the PA commits core



resources, skills and competencies, and overall strengths in terms of physical and financial resources as well as time constraints.

This multi-dimensional framework recognises the generation of cross-fertilisation effects (CFEs) that materialise due to synergies and economies of scope in committing resources and capabilities to marketing actions. Consequently, the marketing objectives of various SBAs are inextricably linked and marketing actions often support each other, achieving objectives that, despite appearances, are not stand-alone.

Four main types of CFEs generate intra-SBA and inter-SBAs positive effects (Fig. 2). First, there are CFEs ascribable to single marketing actions (1a). The latter target a well-defined group of stakeholders yet produce spillover effects in favour of another category of stakeholders of the same SBA. Such cross-fertilisation might be the result of a deliberate marketing strategy willing to serve multiple stakeholders with a common action, or might be the “emergent” outcome of a marketing action originally conceived for a single target. In all cases the positive spillover is fuelled by the synergic interaction of the resources and capabilities deployed in the pursuit of the marketing action. The nature of marketing relationships is homogeneous (e.g., B2B, etc.), as cross-fertilization materializes in different segments of the same SBA.

A second type of CFEs takes place inside the same SBA and refers to synergic interactions between two (or more) marketing actions (1b). Individually, such actions commonly target different stakeholders. Yet they allow synergies to exploit as positive outcomes are achieved due to the multiplier effects produced by the (re-)combination of resources and capabilities committed to the realization of two or more marketing actions. In this case, the nature of the marketing relationships between the PA and stakeholders is homogeneous, as synergies mushroom within the same SBA.

In addition, there are CFEs produced between diverse SBAs. These CFEs unveil a superior degree of complexity, due to the heterogeneous nature of the implied marketing relationships. A first example are those CFEs that involve a single marketing action and produce positive spillovers in favour of stakeholder categories belonging to a diverse SBA (2a). Irrespective of whether these are results of a deliberate / emergent marketing strategy, these CFEs present analogies with case 1a; once more the proliferation of economies of scope enables to better serve multiple stakeholders. Finally, there is a fourth form of CFEs that involves two (or more) marketing actions that are often addressed to different stakeholders (2b). Similarly to the case 1b, these effects exploit the synergies caused by the conjoint achievement of multiple actions. The close interdependence between these actions builds a multiplier effect that spreads across different segments.

CFEs speed-up the growth the marketing activities of PAs. They do so in terms of scope and depth. The generation of diverse types of CFEs via the development of marketing strategies produces a dense and intertwined portfolio of marketing actions feeding various market segments and SBAs. This “ramified” portfolio produces further spillover and multiplier effects that enable a quicker process of market coverage diversification. The collaboration between the PA and key stakeholders in various SBAs enables such worthy outcomes. CFEs also enable a robust accumulation of market and managerial competencies inside the organisation, i.e. by generating faster learning effects across various managerial layers and PA functions and exploiting the experience yielded in different segments.

Nonetheless, the cultivation of a broad marketing actions portfolio may hide threats and drawbacks. The complexity of the game might produce diseconomies of scale ascribable to the management of numerous relationships of diverse nature (e.g., B2B, B2C, etc.) or to the interactions of PAs with stakeholders holding heterogeneous resources, capabilities, and commitments. The definition of clear organisational responsibilities constitutes a key challenge for those PAs aiming to develop a broad strategic marketing scope; hence, successful PAs are prone to establish a marketing department dedicated to the cultivation of competencies that originate from the expanding portfolio of actions.

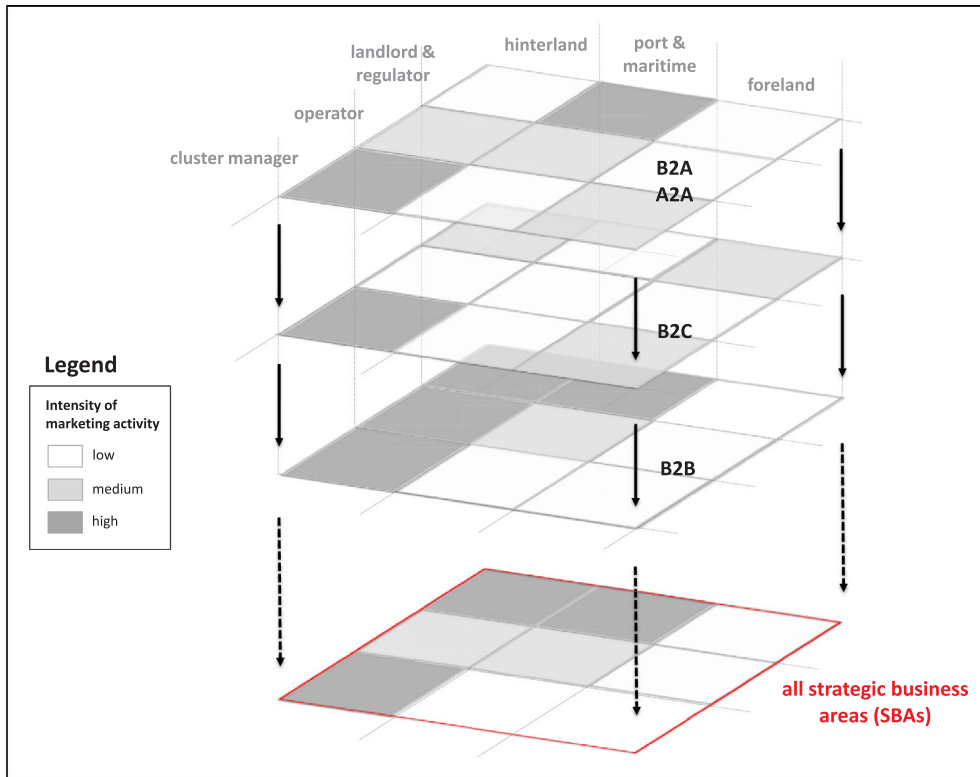
## 5. Strategic marketing positioning of Port Authorities: A taxonomy

Following the definition of the constructs on which marketing segmentation is developed, a PA needs to move forward and put into effect its strategic positioning. Positioning means to occupy in the mind of stakeholders a distinct position in the market, when compared with competitors. The PA might select multiple combinations of stakeholders and marketing actions across SBAs, emphasising the distinguishing features of its value proposition and market image. Fig. 3 depicts such strategic marketing options as a combination of the stakeholder-action matrixes related to each SBA. The potential approaches are diverse, ranging from a very narrow segmentation to full market coverage.

The proposed model recognises the multi-polar attitude of PAs in the pursuit of marketing objectives. When defining its strategic positioning, a PA decides in which segments to be present but also the “intensity” of its marketing efforts (Fig. 3). The numerousness of marketing actions in each segment is a suitable proxy for estimating the PA commitment, at least in terms of deployed resources and capabilities. The intensity of the PA effort translates into a certain degree of marketing activities effectiveness, i.e. the capacity to deliver a solid value proposition to targeted stakeholders. When the existence of numerous CFEs in the “ramified” portfolio of marketing actions enables PA to increase - *ceteris paribus* - the overall effectiveness of its marketing activity, CFEs activate the diffusion of systemic synergies and the set-up of virtuous spin-off effects.

Conceptually, the overall strategic marketing positioning of the PA derives from the virtual “combination” of its individual positioning in each SBA. In this regard, the detailed multi-layered framework appreciates the complexity of PA marketing strategy, where the intensity of the overall positioning in each segment (as combination of all SBAs) is constituted by the average marketing efforts (numerousness of marketing actions) undertaken in the corresponding segment of each SBA. For instance, a PA might develop a very intense marketing activity in some A2A and B2C segments, being contextually absent from most B2B markets.

Essentially, in each SBA there could be five different patterns of target market selection. These are (i) single-segment concentration, (ii) selective specialization; (iii) product (i.e. marketing action) specialization; (iv) market (i.e. stakeholder) specialization; and (vi) full market coverage (Fig. 4). This pluralisation of actions is largely corresponding to specialization observed in



Source: authors' own elaboration.

Fig. 3. Strategic marketing options as combination of the stakeholder-action matrixes related to various SBAs.

Source: authors' own elaboration.

shipping (i.e. transhipped/transit/local/empty container markets; luxury/premium/mass cruises, etc.), and the expansion of actors active in port specific or port related activities.

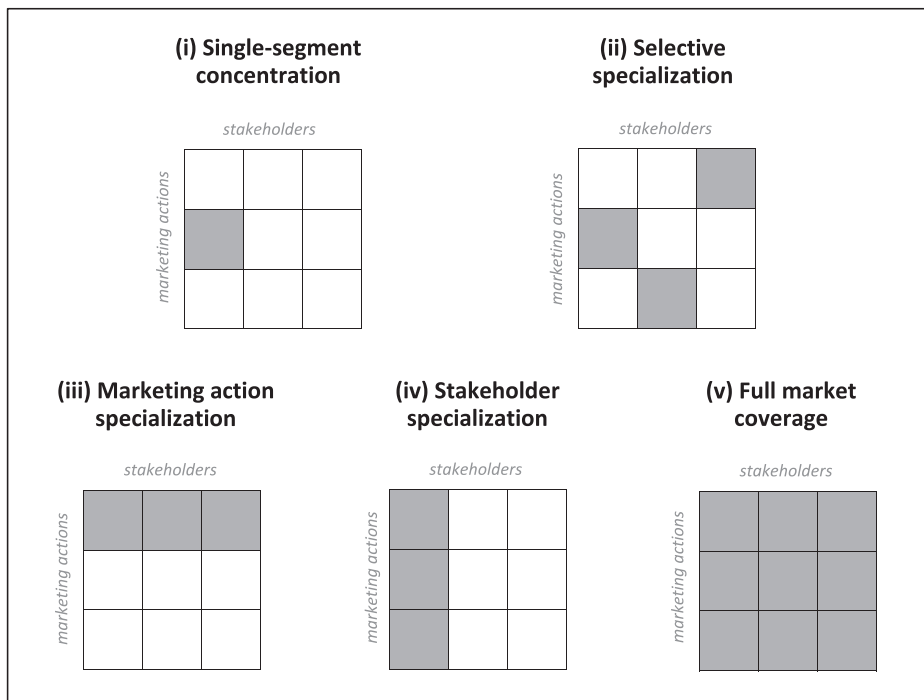
In case of single-segment concentration (i), i.e. when a port is active in some shipping markets (i.e. a container port, such Gioia Tauro in Italy; or a cruise port, like Santorini in Greece, or Palamos in Spain), the PA decides to cater to a single segment only. Understanding the needs and wants of the specific segment the PA focuses on a homogeneous group of stakeholders reached via devoted marketing action(s). The geography of targeted stakeholders is limited. This approach typically ensures cost flexibility for service production and promotion, and leads to specialization. This might increase the chances of achieving a strong market presence and becoming a market leader in the particular segment. As a limitation, the PA is more exposed to risk, given the absence of any form of diversification – i.e. unforeseen contextual changes would need long time to adapt.

In case of selective specialization (ii), the PA identifies a number of target segments, and then undertakes varied marketing actions directed to a number of stakeholder groups. This multi-segment strategy has the advantage of risk diversification. The PA can achieve economies of scale and scope, and gain out of existing synergies among marketing actions (cross-fertilization). Drawbacks relate to the need of catering to more than one segment in a complex and dynamic environment often belonging to different SBAs. Hence, it is required to develop multi-market knowledge and competencies in sophisticated marketing activities.

Marketing action specialization (iii) means that the PA utilises a set of similar marketing actions to deal with several different stakeholders across the hinterland-foreland continuum. The advantage of this approach is that the PA caters to different segments with a single marketing action, thus can internally develop unique resources and capabilities in that marketing area.

In case of stakeholder specialization (iv), the PA interacts with one specific market only, trying to match needs of a particular stakeholder group. The advantage of this pattern is that in case of a monopolistic/oligopolistic environment (such as the container shipping market that is dominated by alliances of few companies, or the cruise market that is dominated by few brands being part of the Carnival and RCCL groups), the PA has the potential to adjust. The geography of stakeholders is limited, reducing the complexity of marketing actions. The weakest point of this positioning is that the PA becomes stakeholder-focused: if the specific segment weakens, the PA risks a profound downsizing or even a market exit.

Full market coverage (v) implies that the PA virtually covers all segments of the market. This strategy demands the commitment of a great amount of financial and technical resources, and the capacity to face diverse contexts and stakeholder categories. The advantages of full are that a large-scale diversification (multi-geography of stakeholders) enables to reduce market and other types of risk, minimising the chances of total failure. In addition, the PA can generate synergies from its presence in various segments as the “ramified” portfolio of marketing actions induces CFEs within and among SBAs. The main drawback is the implied lack of focus



Source: authors' own elaboration.

Fig. 4. The strategic marketing options of market coverage by the PA.

Source: authors' own elaboration.

difficulty to a marketing action or any particular stakeholder market. In addition, marketing actions have to intercept stakeholders in multiple geographic regions, and port markets adding further complexity to the overall picture.

When defining its strategic positioning a PA typically decides to follow one of the above five patterns. The proposed taxonomy applies both to single SBAs and to the overall strategic market positioning, the latter being the sum of the diverse SBA layers. In practice, the positioning in different SBAs can vary substantially. A PA might opt to undertake an intense and highly diversified positioning (even a full coverage) in A2A/B2A business areas, whereas it can proceed to “only” a limited and selective segmentation in B2B markets. The multi-polar nature of marketing strategies in hybrid organisations, such as modern PAs, is demonstrated by the variant market coverage in diverse SBAs as well as the heterogeneous nature and intensity of relationships with stakeholders (e.g., B2B, B2C, and B2A/A2A).

## 6. Concluding remarks

This study introduces a novel conceptualisation of PA marketing strategies. Framing a relevant case of a hybrid organisation into a business marketing perspective, it theorises the PA strategic positioning based on marketing objectives, targeted port stakeholders, and the implied portfolio of marketing actions. This work defines a three-layered framework understanding the complex design of a PA marketing positioning across interlinked SBAs. The hybridity of PAs is smoothly recognized in the detailed modelling that includes marketing objectives embedded into different SBAs.

This theorisation contributes to scholarly research in a number of ways. First, the adoption of a business marketing perspective allows an original outline of the marketing objectives of PAs in different SBAs. Second, the detailed novel multi-dimensional construct captures the hybridity of the PA marketing approach across different, but closely interlinked, SBAs. Consequently, it provides a framework for understanding and analysing the main types of CFEs that materialise both within a SBA and among various SBAs. CFEs are value multipliers for the PA as well as the entire port cluster, given the synergies produced in the dense architecture of marketing actions.

Third, the defined model underlines the role of the portfolio of marketing actions in firm value co-creation (Rao and Bharadwaj, 2008; Srinivasan and Hanssens, 2009; Stewart, 2009), as a strategic marketing tool to define the PA positioning, demonstrating a conceptual bridge between marketing objectives and targeted stakeholders. It also recognises the emergence of organisational challenges for PAs as regards the management of this portfolio. Fourth, consistently with the strategic marketing literature (Day and Wensley, 1983; Kotler and Keller, 2009; Varadarajan, 2010), the study determines a relevant taxonomy of the strategic positioning of the PA, based on present patterns of market coverage (i.e. concentration, specialization, full market) in the maritime logistics industry.

Finally, the study undertakes a refreshing application of well-established constructs developed in the theory of the “renaissance”

of PAs. The Verhoeven (2010, 2015) theorisation is applied to the strategic marketing of PAs, a conceptual advancement enabling to categorise marketing actions and stakeholders in the light of the innovative managerial paradigms of PAs (i.e. functions) and the associated expansion of the geographic boundaries of their jurisdiction.

This conceptualisation also brings insightful implications for practitioners. As described in the proposed framework, marketing strategies enacted by PAs allow to maximise the value creation processes for each stakeholder, serving latent needs perceived by the market players and defining inland, foreland and maritime targets. The selection of targeted stakeholders systematises planning the mission, identifying strategic intent (long-term perspective); and building the portfolio of marketing actions on potential SBAs (medium or short-term perspective).

The multi-layers approach to marketing relationships adopted in this work appears an essential choice in port reform implementation. This is a framework that provides guidance to PA executives dealing with the management of a transition from narrow or even absent marketing focus to the establishment of a wide array of marketing actions taking place in various SBAs. Moreover, the proposed framework identifies potential synergies and cross-fertilisation processes among marketing activities related to specific targets. The work underlines how each PA could identify its own portfolio of marketing actions as a strategic option of market coverage, consistent with phenomena of port specialization. In planning marketing actions, PAs have to focus on the most suitable stakeholders that are capable to co-create a differential value for the entire port community.

The outcomes of this study provide sound theoretical arguments for developing future research avenues. Scholars are invited to advance this conceptualisation by exploring more in-depth the construct of CFEs in the different SBAs. A further sophistication of the notion of “portfolio of marketing actions” is indeed required, emphasising the peculiarities of the stakeholders involved and the nature and temporal evolution of the associated relationships. Future studies are also encouraged to advance this model by including governance and managerial dimensions as well as institutional factors, which might move forward the discussion on the reasons behind the diverse strategic positioning of PAs. An analysis of triggers and constraints of PA marketing strategies would be welcomed.

Finally, the recommended multi-dimensional framework offers possibilities for future empirical applications. It could be interesting to define a hierarchy of marketing strategies, developing a graphical representation of the phenomena to describe the marketing scope, the criteria of SBAs selection, and the decision alternatives (e.g. strategic options of market coverage). Scholars are also invited to study comparatively the geographical (e.g. cross-regional comparisons) or evolution perspectives of existing PAs marketing strategies. In this vein, future studies could underline the different role of governance model (e.g. landlord port, tool port or operating port) and ownership (e.g. public, hybrid, vs. private; central vs. local) in the definition of strategic marketing positioning. Moreover, empirical studies based on quantitative methods could measure the intensity (e.g. number of marketing actions per segment) and the success of the marketing activity perceived by stakeholders (e.g. customer satisfaction, loyalty, etc.).

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