

A lesson at the *Genoa Port Centre*

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Last May our class visited the Genoa Port Center, a permanent exhibition on the port activities situated in the former docks of Genoa (i.e. Magazzini del Cotone).

It was an interesting experience that allowed us to understand how complex the port system is and what its processes are.

We were welcomed by Dr. Barbara Giorgi, a biologist who works at the center, and her collaborator, a university student who spoke to us in English.

First, we were shown a huge relief map of the port. Our guides explained to us about the functions of the different areas of the hub, from those specializing in repair and maintenance services to the ferry and passenger terminals, the areas for bulks, perishable goods, containers, petroleum products and chemicals.



Next, we moved to the section dedicated to marine cartography and watched the nautical charts by the Hydrographic Institute. Although paper charts are always kept in case of emergency, now everything is marked digitally: basins, depths of the seabed, routes. Weather conditions, waves and tides are always monitored by the Ligurian Regional Agency for Environmental Protection.



The port processes are constantly controlled by computerized systems like the VTS (Vessel Traffic Service), which allows to coordinate all port operations and to reduce loading and unloading time, accidents and pollution. We tried the VTS simulator to understand how the system operates.

When a ship enters the port, it is assisted by a tugboat, a small vessel conducted by pilots from the port of Genoa. Once the tugboat has approached the ship, one of the pilots gets on board and manages the mooring procedure, while the tugboat pulls the ship to the quay. It is a risky maneuver that requires experienced professionals with a deep knowledge of the port features, winds and tides.



Another useful digital system is *e-port*, an application that handles all import-export procedures and customs clearance, reducing paper documents, time and costs.



Our guide told us that the first container was created by an American trucking entrepreneur who was looking for a faster method for loading goods on his trucks and for storing them at the port of departure. We learnt that there are different types of containers depending on their size.

These metal boxes can measure 20x8x8 feet corresponding to a measure unit called TEU (Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit) or 6.10x2.44x2,59 meters.



When the containers have been unloaded from the ship, they are controlled to detect dangerous and illegal goods, like weapons, drugs, non-declared items. The simulator for loading and unloading containers gave us a practical idea of how this procedure is carried out.



Visiting the Center was a useful and enjoying experience. We learnt a lot of things about the port, its functions and organization in a practical way, thanks to the many pictures, scale models displayed, the monitors, simulators and the clear explanations provided by or guides. We discovered some parts of the port we did not know and got lots of precious information.



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