BOOK REVIEW

Ports, crime and security: governing and policing seaports in a changing world

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The relationship between ports, crime and security is a significant and analytically relevant topic. The authors fill the gaps in the existing literature and contribute to the ongoing lively discourse on the subject by providing in-depth analysis and frameworks that problematize the interactions and dynamics characteristic of ports. The study addresses several fact-finding questions, detailing how crimes manifest in ports and how multifaceted phenomena can be controlled in such a complex environment, emphasizing the empirical consequences.

The book follows a multi- and interdisciplinary approach that is essential to the research topic. Indeed, as the authors state, as 'multivalent spaces' (p. 2) ports should be analysed from a sociological point of view considering their particular nature. The introduction considers the plurality of dimensions represented by ports as social, political and economic environments, where goods transit, are exchanged and where people connect. Seaports are spaces that require a certain level of security both to protect goods, trade and infrastructure, and to prevent various forms of crime. Hence, ports can be considered dichotomous spaces where legal and illegal dimensions interact. The book's structure is consistent with this approach.

The first chapter analyses the relationship between the port economy, institutions and politics, highlighting the complexity of seaports, especially from an economic perspective. They are part of global trade networks and supply chains; they are, therefore, spaces in which licit and illicit traffic transits, and they are subject to the development of the shipping and maritime industry. The authors provide a systematization of local and global interactions between different actors. Innovation, regeneration, planning and governance are analysed to show how 'ports are characterised by several endogenous factors that can cause illegal activities to emerge' (p. 47).

The topic is critically analysed by the authors, who provide an analytical framework for understanding how multilevel criminality and complex crimes manifest themselves in and through ports. This research leads the reader to consider the multiple meanings that seaports represent for crime, as a 'social opportunity structure and offender convergence settings' (Kleemans, 2018, p. 2). The authors address the complicated relationship between the local and global dimensions of ports and organized crime phenomena (p. 76), referring to the specific relationship between seaports, dry ports, cities and hinterlands (Sergi, 2020), emphasizing the borderland nature of the space. Investigating ports' social, spatial and economic environment allows us to identify the variety of criminal opportunities the afford and leads to an exploration of the composite policing scenario and, ultimately, the complex governance of port security.

This last topic requires empirical examination. The governance of port security is closely related to the issue of port governance and in particular with its public, private and/or hybrid nature, since different models have been developed globally (Brooks & Cullinane, 2007). As the authors argue, security in ports 'incorporates [...] different security phenomena' (p. 79) and can engage a 'considerable number of "actors" that can be identified as security "providers"' (p. 79). Specifically, the differing nature of ports and various governance models have an impact on the mechanisms by which public and private security providers operate. Therefore, the authors recognize a certain 'degree of hybridity' (p. 88), which poses problems regarding coordination and trust to improve cooperation between private and public actors—who are driven by different purposes and priorities—and to improve cooperation among security actors at the local, national and international levels.

In parallel, it is necessary to consider a direct consequence of ports' complexity, namely, the informal dynamics that characterize ports. In fact, alongside laws and institutional rules, informal practices and conventions have taken root over time and now play a role in governing the docksides. These differ from port to port because they are determined by cultural and organizational traditions and may change due to developments in the labour market, increased automation and industrialization (Bottalico, 2022).

The study seems to confirm that case studies and diachronic analysis of criminal phenomena in seaports are essential. Indeed, it is necessary to consider the global transformations of shipping and the local transformations of port cities and port regions in order to comprehensively explain the illegal dynamics that rely on the assets of the legal economy. As the authors show, the processes of modernization and globalization that affect seaports—and more generally global trade networks—can multiply or reduce the opportunity for illegal actors to exploit the port environment, raising issues of policing, security and control. From an analytical point of view, the topic is relevant because it addresses assumptions about how complex crime and criminal organizations are able to operate in a formally prohibited space, that is, in a place where people can only enter if authorized by the entity operating the port.

The results presented by the authors are inspiring because they open up a broader reflection that places port security studies within a broader analysis of maritime security and introduces new research topics. The authors consider modern technologies, digitization and automation as both 'a challenge and opportunity for port security' (p. 111), which are even more puzzling considering recent developments involving artificial intelligence.

In conclusion, the quality of the study can be measured by the number of questions, issues and possible research topics that emerge when reading the book. It demonstrates how empirical research on port security needs to be expanded.

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