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How to cope with state intervention in municipal property? The creation of the Autonomous Port of Strasbourg in 1926 and its effects on the port administrations of Strasbourg and Kehl (1918 –1939)

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Abstract

The paper presents the influence of the shift in national borders after the Great War and its consequences for the development of the port of Strasbourg's hinterland. It goes into detail as regards the role of the French State which was heavily involved in infrastructure investments during the period in question. The recently recovered port on the Rhine was in fact considered as a geostrategic tool for French international trade and the country's diplomatic presence in the Rhine region. In this context, how did the municipality and the local entrepreneurs react to this new position? In what way did the State's priorities change during the inter-war period?



Contemporary situation and extension of the ports of Strasbourg and Kehl on the French German border

Introduction

In 1918, the shift in the borders which occurred as a result of the First World War gave the port of Strasbourg a new strategic role. The new organisation of the region gave the port opportunities in the Départements of the east of France and established it as the major base for France's political and economic presence on the Rhine. With this new state of affairs came a change in status: from being a Rhine port under municipal control, in 1926 it became an "autonomous port", thereby giving concrete expression to the commitment of the French State to participate financially in its development. Sustained business activity re-established pre-war trends and encouraged the administration to plan a major extension. The temporary occupation of the facilities of the neighbouring port of Kehl which was granted under the Versailles Treaty, provided a way of absorbing the increase in traffic while limiting the risks of competition. With its outstanding facilities, the port of Strasbourg established itself as the linchpin of the French presence on the Rhine, opposite a German presence that was to be bypassed.

This paper sets out to examine how the ports were affected by the geopolitical struggle that was instituted to France's advantage after 1918 and where, at the local level, the French central authorities nevertheless had to deal with the City of Strasbourg which was eager to retain its rights over the port whose take-off it had financed on its own. The statutes of the Autonomous Port to this day bear the marks of this historical compromise which remains the only one of its kind in French administrative law. Our analysis will briefly touch on the increase in traffic in the Port of Strasbourg before 1914. It will also demonstrate the new geopolitical position of the port and the role assigned to it by the victorious French State. The institutional analysis will then situate the governance of the port in a double confrontation: the confrontation between the French State and the Municipality of Strasbourg and the confrontation with the German State when France temporarily took control of the port facilities at Kehl. Finally, the paper will describe the different phases of the extension of the port facilities and the manner in which they were financed.

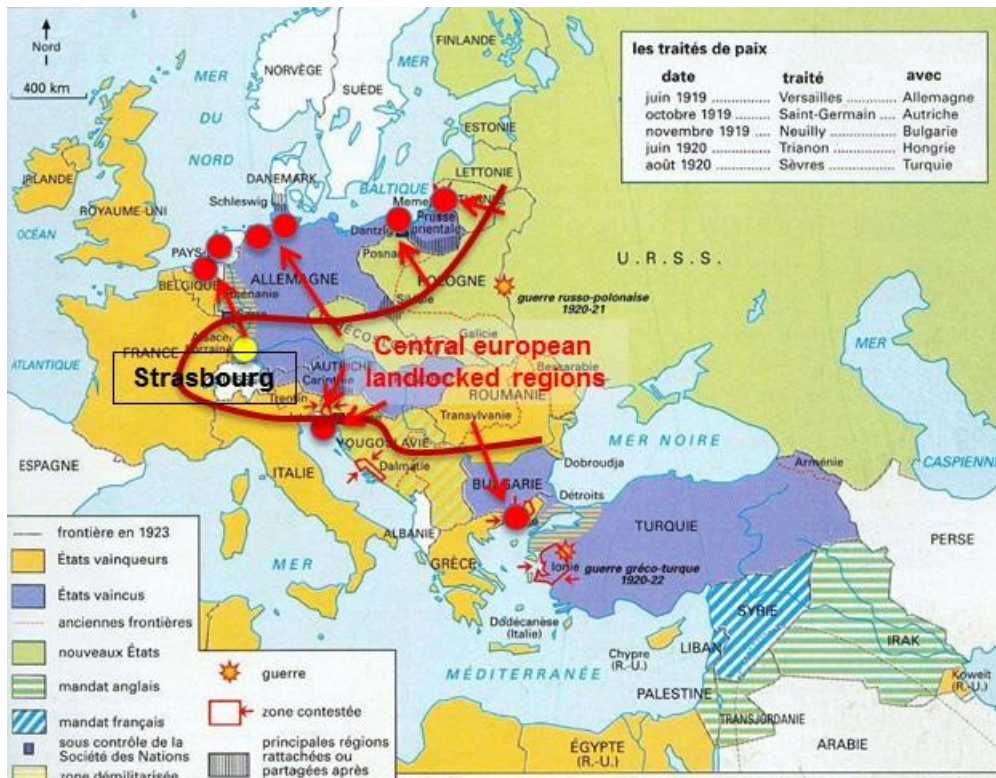
The principal sources of this research are in the archives of the City of Strasbourg (Série 42 MW) and of the Autonomous port of Strasbourg which have been lodged with the Departmental archives of the Bas-Rhin (Fonds 59 J). The work has drawn on the standard

history of the autonomous port by André Trinquet (1951) and on a number of papers published at the time the various improvements were made to the port, in particular in geographical journals. In addition to the administrative and accounting reports which are necessarily important in this type of work, the relative abundance of administrative documents bear witness to the fact that the decisions taken in Strasbourg were monitored and debated at a high level (Ministers, Chamber of Deputies and the Senate) and gives us an idea of the administrative approach adopted by the centralised French state, but also shows the national importance given to improving the Port of Strasbourg at a time of tension between France and Germany, which is an element we have partly forgotten today.

The terms under which the Port of Strasbourg was returned to France

Guaranteeing sea access for landlocked states is a key component of the European territorial settlement that was introduced at Versailles (Howkins, 1996). As witness of this we can cite the extension of inland navigation rights, the creation of the city states of Danzig, Memel and Trieste, or the guarantee of free warehouses for Czechoslovakia at Hamburg and Stettin (Jakubec, 1998, 2001). It is within this broader context (Fig.1) that we should consider the case of the port of Strasbourg and the access to the sea which it provides to the entire East of France, in particular in view of the fact that the Treaty of Versailles extended access to the Rhine which was already given the legal status of a sea inlet to vessels irrespective of their flag whereas previously navigation rights had been restricted to riparian states (Article 356 of the Treaty of Versailles).

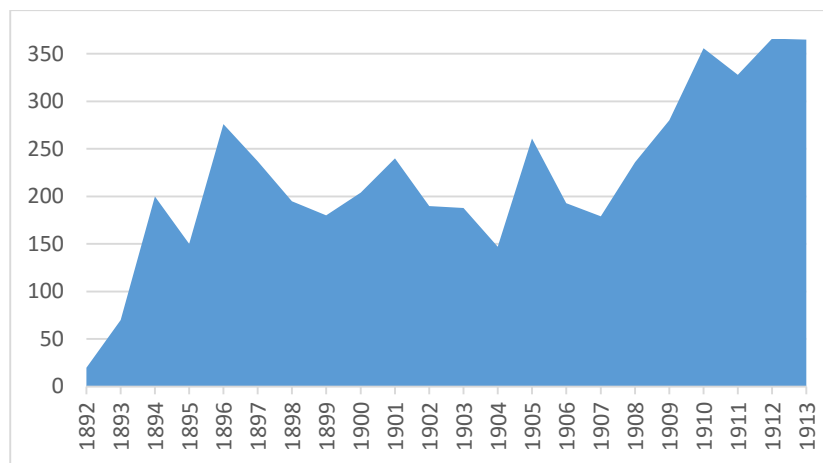
Figure 1. Strasbourg within the larger challenge of sea access for landlocked territories as interpreted in the Versailles Treaty



The conditions for a rapid increase in traffic through Strasbourg were in fact already partly in place before 1914 when the year-round navigation head at Mannheim was moved upstream from the confluence with the Neckar where the Rhine becomes both wider and more regular. In addition, the Alpine flow regime of the Rhine at Strasbourg meant that major engineering works were required which were delayed, not only for economic reasons (construction costs, technical doubts) but also for political reasons, as although Alsace-Moselle was fully part of the Second Reich after its annexation in 1870, its status was that of part of the empire and it was not able to benefit from the official aid granted to its rival ports. Without support in the Bundesrat, Alsace-Moselle found it difficult to stand up for the rights of Strasbourg against Mannheim, which was supported by the Grand Duchy of Baden or Ludwigshafen which was supported by Bavaria. These two ports, with their enviable position of navigation head on the Rhine firmly supported the status quo. After long and costly procedures on the part of Strasbourg Chamber of Commerce, the request to put the situation right was finally successful

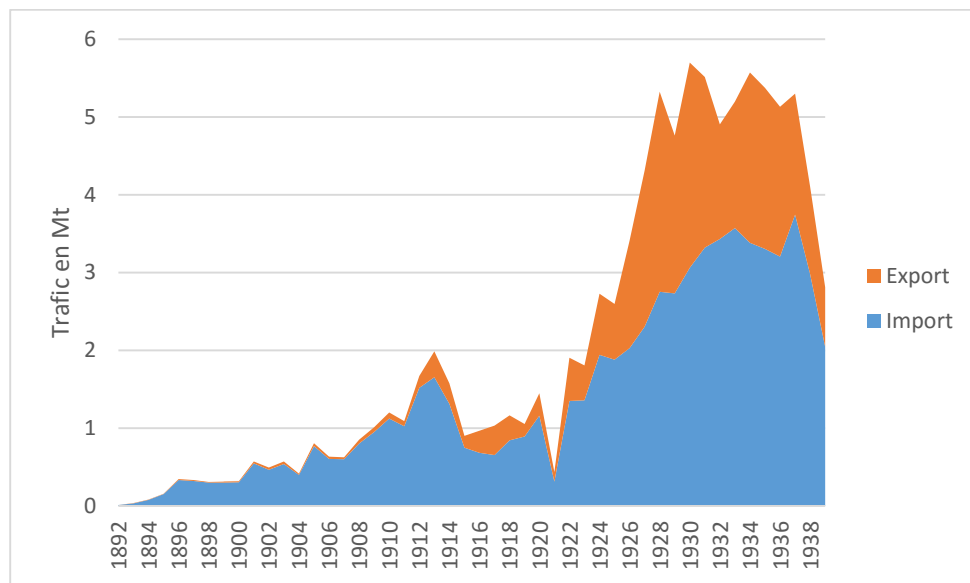
in the 1906. Work on the construction of angled berths that were perpendicular to the current between 1907 and 1924 ensured that the river remained navigable at all times and provided a draught of water of 2.60m for eight months of the year. On the eve of the First World War, the Rhine was navigable all year round downstream of Strasbourg (Fig.2) and the port became an attractive transit point on the river and remained so from 1913 to 1960.

Figure 2. Number of navigable days in a year on the Rhine at Strasbourg (Data: Trinquet, 1951)



River engineering works made Strasbourg a navigation head on the Rhine for year-round services which led to a rapid increase in traffic. At the same time the municipality of Strasbourg undertook the modernization of its port installations, as did the German ports (Léon, 1903), but at higher cost due to the lack of State subsidies. In 1892 it financed the construction of the Austerlitz dock on the new canal linking the Rhine to the Rhône au Rhin and Marne au Rhin canals avoiding the narrow crossing of the city (Dusuzeau dock 1882). The extension works continued with the building of two more docks (the Bassin de Commerce and the Bassin de l'Industrie) which opened in 1901 bringing the port closer to the Rhine. Annual traffic increased from 1100 tonnes in the 1880s to 500,000 tonnes in 1900 to reach 2 million tonnes in 1913 (Fig. 3). This consisted of imports of coal from the Ruhr (56%) and of cereals (31%), and exports of machines (31%), potash (21%), wood (13 %) and washing soda (11%). In 1913, the municipal port which handled the 2.9 million tonnes of traffic was saturated (Nonn, 1980). In response to this commercial threat, the Baden railway company which already had a presence in Mannheim opened the port of Kehl in 1900 opposite Strasbourg's port installations in order to keep control of through traffic heading for Switzerland and southern Germany (Trabant, 1966).

Figure 3. Traffic through the port of Strasbourg (1892 - 1939) in million tonnes (Data from Trinquet, 1951)



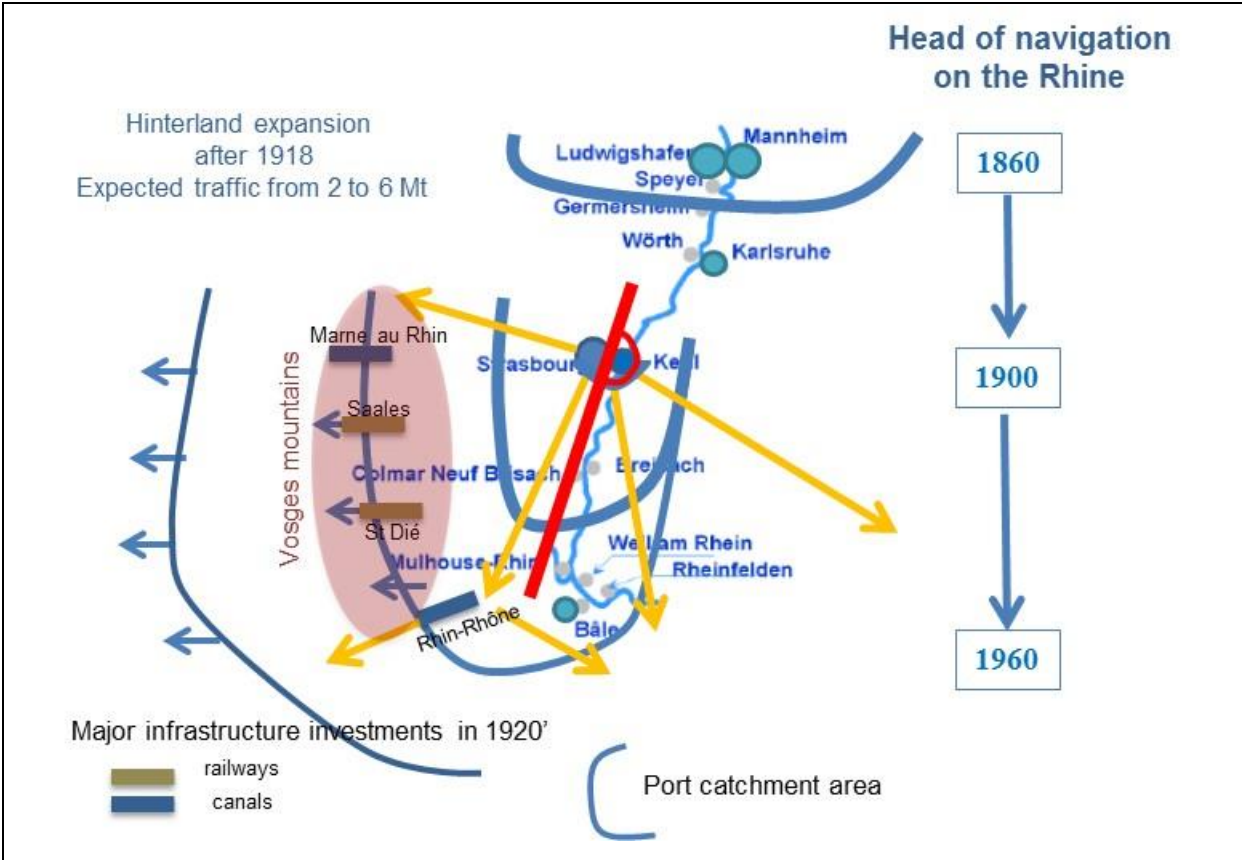
Making Strasbourg into a French gateway on the Rhine

Immediately after the outbreak of the First World War, the French government set up the Alsace-Lorraine Conference soon to be followed by the Department for Alsace-Lorraine which had a number of units that carried out studies on various topics. The aim of these bodies was to foresee the practical conditions under which Alsace and Moselle could be returned to France (Schmauch, 2004). One of the working groups dealt with the Rhine and its facilities. At the same time, private communities issued memorandums on economic and industrial matters. The necessary measures concerned three aspects: increasing the capacity of the port, managing the traffic through Kehl and managing the customs facilities for through traffic.

Once Strasbourg was returned to France, its port hinterland was likely to spread beyond the Vosges to fifteen or so other Départements in the East of France with considerable industrial and agricultural potential. This gave rise to some fears among existing industrial interests in “Old France” which, worried by the power of the production system in Alsace asked for a period of time in which to adapt. Considerable efforts were made to facilitate trade with the

recovered Départements in Alsace and Moselle in order to relaunch the region’s economy as rapidly as possible and integrate it within a new national framework. A number of projects were initiated by Alexandre Millerand, the Commissaire Général de la République, which also aimed to provide jobs for the large number of people who were unemployed during this difficult period (Lespinet-Moret, 2011). In 1919, work began on the Saales - Saint-Dié railway line which opened in 1928. In the wake of this, construction of the 6.8 km tunnel between Sainte-Marie aux Mines and Saint-Dié was declared to be of public utility on 18 July 1929 and the tunnel was opened in August 1937. However, the proposed direct rail link between Colmar and Belfort without passing through the junction of Mulhouse was rejected. As far as waterways were concerned, unification works were undertaken westwards on the canal de la Marne au Rhin and traffic conditions towards the south were improved by the widening of the 125km Rhône au Rhin canal between Mulhouse and the Doubs basin which was started in 1920 and finished in 1933 (Fig.4).

Figure 4. Displacement of the head of navigation and its territorial interpretation in hinterland redefinition



The alignment of railway tariffs in Alsace-Lorraine with national rates (Decree of 22/1/1023) increased prices for captive local traffic, but lowered the cost of long distance transport and encouraged transit through a port to the Lyon market. However, operational integration was only possible up to a certain point. A number of resolutions were passed and, following the example of the Bas-Rhin Chamber of Commerce, Strasbourg stated its official opposition to the integration of the Alsace-Lorraine network within the Compagnie de l'Est (Eastern Railway Company). Admittedly, the former had always shown much more interest in developing port activities than the Compagnie de l'Est.

The Rhine offered great potential for industrial exports to the markets in Europe and the overseas colonies (iron and steel industry, chemicals and manufactured products). It also provided excellent access to raw materials such as coal, American wheat and the possibility of exporting raw materials such as iron ore from Lorraine and potash from Haute-Alsace the production of which had been reduced by the German system of cartels. The first installations for receiving oil imports were put in place in 1922 and the port of Strasbourg redistributed these in eastern France and Switzerland. This new role was confirmed with the construction of a dedicated dock in 1927. At the same time, storage and first processing activities, which were already present before the war, were increased and diversified (flour milling, malting, oil mills, coking plants, manufacture of coal briquettes and pellets, thermal power stations). It is in this context of international openness that we should see Strasbourg's organisation of the Colonial Exhibition between July and October 1924 with a slogan which presented the port of Strasbourg as "The great sea port of the East".

Organizing France's fourth seaboard

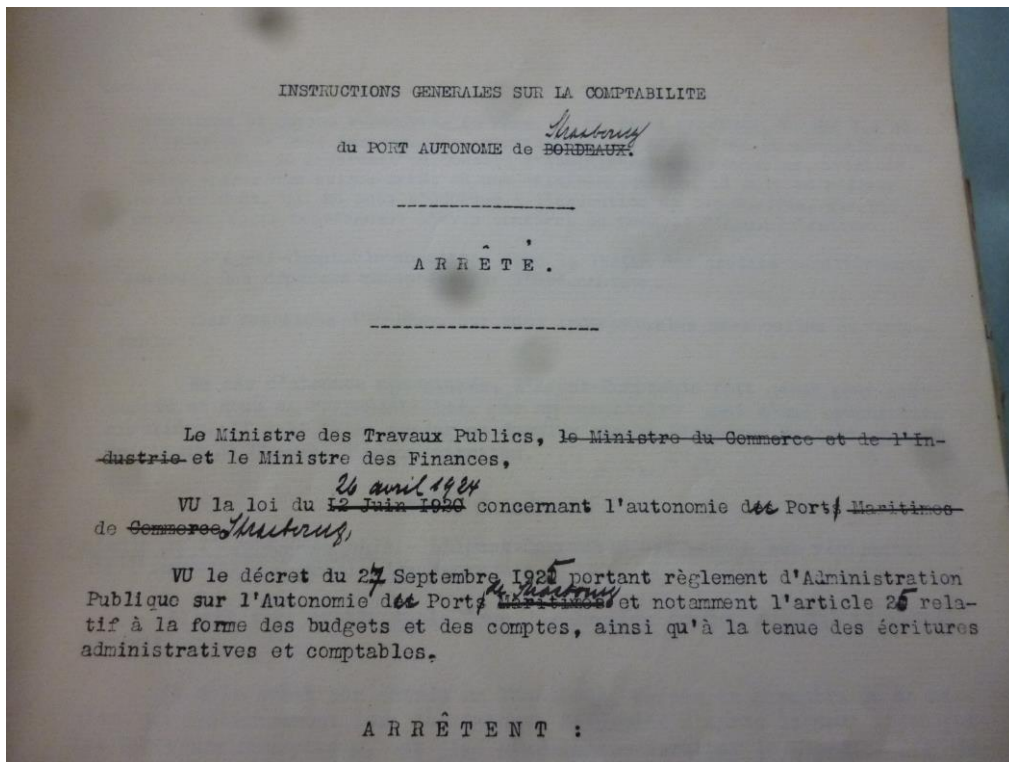
The principal aim of gaining access to the Rhine was to gain access to the sea. Although the port of Strasbourg is some 700km from the coast and unable to handle seagoing vessels, its functions were nevertheless comparable to those of a Seaport. This situation is not the outcome of a single piece of legislation but the combination of the number of economic factors: uncertainty about the international openness of France's other river ports, an autonomous status directly based on the maritime bodies running the ports of Bordeaux and

Le Havre (Fig.5) which had been recently created (Act of 3/6/1919)¹. The volumes handled in Strasbourg favourably impressed the French experts. These meant that the port installations could compete on an equal footing with those of seaports and result in attractive pricing². At the Congress of the International Navigation Association held in Strasbourg in 1919, the geographer Lucien Gallois stated that “the low cost of freight on the Rhine means that Strasbourg is the equivalent of no more than 90 km from the sea by rail” (Gallois 1919).

¹ The autonomous status of French maritime ports institutionalized the collegial decision-making practices and unity of command that was introduced during the war. In reality, its autonomy with regard to the central administration remained nevertheless limited. The Board of Directors was enlarged to bring in representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, elected officials from the major town in the area, representatives from the railways, the central administration, the port workforce and finally an officer from the national navy. Effective control remained nevertheless with the public authorities through the management role awarded to a State-employed engineer.

² In 1928 for example, the annual traffic passing through Strasbourg was 5.325 million tonnes compared with Marseille’s 8.870 million tonnes, Rouen’s 6,902 million tonnes and Le Havre’s 5,071 million tonnes. This made Strasbourg France’s fourth largest port in terms of volume (see Trinquet, 1951, p. 543).

Figure 5. Preparatory working document for the statutes of the Autonomous Port of Strasbourg (Archives of the Bas-Rhin Département, photograph by author)



Finally, the port's maritime characteristics stem from the application of specific fiscal rules, particularly the exoneration from warehouse and origin surcharges³ which make it possible to consider Strasbourg as the first port of contact, i.e. a recognised national entry point which does not require an intermediate foreign port. This system was nevertheless applied only in the three Départements that had been returned to France, as long as the goods were transhipped at Antwerp, and on condition that maritime transport was performed under the French flag. After the end of the First World War, the commercial advantage that had been granted to the large Belgian port provided the basis for the forging of an economic and political alliance against Rotterdam, which was felt to be more bound to German interests. The operators of the French ports in the North Sea and English Channel objected to the terms that gave one port, even though it belonged to a friendly nation, the advantage for traffic to Alsace-Lorraine, taking some traffic from them. The port of Strasbourg and the river transport sector on the other hand campaigned for an extension of these exemption rights to Rotterdam

³ This tax was levied on products imported by a foreign port and was intended to protect France's domestic ports.

which had the advantage of a shorter route to Strasbourg. In order to diminish Antwerp's economic disadvantage, Belgium paid for the haulage of loaded units between Antwerp and Dordrecht (Seberechts, 1989). There was, however, complete freedom of choice with regard to choice of a land transport operator.

The surtax exemption also allowed for the possibility for goods to be transported by rail to Thionville or Alsace (in the case of low water levels on the Rhine). Alsace's potash production, which had been reduced under the dominance of the German cartels, was considerably stepped up for export to the United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Denmark which was as much to the benefit of Strasbourg, where it was loaded, as Antwerp. On the return journey, the empty holds providing an opportunity for the importation of bulk materials. Belgium's return to partial neutrality in 1937 led to a weakening of diplomatic ties with France. The customs exception was awarded to Rotterdam in 1938, just before it was definitively dropped in 1940.

The second measure that encouraged traffic through Strasbourg was the retention of historical practices on the Rhine and the modification of French warehouse management legislation. This made it possible to maintain private services and gave Strasbourg a free choice as regards warehousing charges. Any step to align the situation with French common law would have reduced Strasbourg's commercial flexibility and led to the transfer of traffic to neighbouring ports. This arrangement reveals an attitude of greater commercial freedom on the Rhine which we need to see in a context of competition between French and German legislative systems and the unifying principle of administrative management as a public service as practiced in France. These two traditions clearly inform the differing positions held by the representatives of the city of Strasbourg and the new supervisory authorities.

One imperative: circumventing German interests

Complying with the wishes of the Alsace-Lorraine Conference and the industry of Alsace, immediately after the armistice the French State adopted an ambitious policy for the Rhine, which received support from the highest levels of government. This opening up of the Rhine was initially developed as a means of circumventing German interests. Apart from regional policy aspects, the opening up of the region also required full control of the river's equipment. Before 1918, most of Strasbourg's port equipment was in the hands of German interests

(shipping companies or coal firms such as the Kohlensyndicat). In the period immediately after the armistice there was therefore a danger that Alsace's limited control over the installations would severely restrict port traffic. The imbalance was overcome by confiscation or forced purchase which placed French entrepreneurs in the position in the industry and trade previously held by German private capital. National independence also dictated the need for a fleet on the Rhine flying the French flag. In addition to the cession of vessels by the defeated Germany as reparations⁴ (article 339 of the treaty of Versailles), French shipping and warehousing companies were given priority access to a number of Rhine ports. This clause meant that French shipping companies were able to provide transport services independently of German interests (commercial support, mechanical maintenance and a vessel lightening station). Confiscating part of the German Rhine fleet in the framework of reparations was France's way of affirming its full sovereignty over the Rhine.

Strasbourg was obviously destined to become the home port for this newly created French merchant fleet. However, the modern repair and construction facilities that were necessary to maintain it did not open until 1936. Priority was also given to setting up a pilotage school in order to prepare French crews for the Rhine Patent examination⁵ which became necessary after German crews went on strike following the occupation of the Ruhr in 1923 (Nonn, 1980). Engineering and commercial schools were also opened, in order to set up a shipping exchange.

Astutely, the French authorities made much of the prejudicial activities on the part of the German Reich with regard to the Port of Strasbourg in order to claim compensation. Demanding "fair reparation for the interests of Strasbourg" gave the French State the opportunity to present itself as a defender of the port's interests and legitimise the development of its new power on the Rhine. We shall now examine the arguments that were put forward. Although they were to some extent justified, they were nevertheless obviously partly motivated by commercial competition. After 1918, the arguments took a nationalistic turn and were to be taken up with little critical examination in subsequent legislation.

⁴ The 300,000 tonnes of barges that were confiscated were used to form five companies under private law (Société alsacienne de navigation et entrepôts – Société française de navigation rhénane – Société générale de navigation et d'entrepôts, Sté du Port de Givet, Compagnie strasbourgeoise de navigation).

⁵ "At the time of the armistice in 1918 there were no more than 18 patented barge owners who came from Alsace while more than 2000 were needed to run the French fleet" (Trinquet, 1953, 131 – quoting Marc Lucius).

The Grand Duchy of Baden was criticised for delaying the river training works on the Rhine in order to protect the interests of the port of Mannheim with its highly-subsidised facilities. Alsace paid for a disproportionately high proportion of the costs of river engineering works, as it was they who desired them. Finally, when the requested engineering works had been performed, Badenese interests rapidly built a new port at Kehl, which was opened a year before the port of Strasbourg, in 1900. The Reich was accused of charging the city excessively high prices for military land in order to derive benefits from the construction of the port installations in the Bassin de Commerce and the Bassin de l'Industrie. Finally, it was claimed that Strasbourg's port traffic had suffered from potash mining rights restrictions which favoured potash producers from central Germany over those in Alsace.

The relations between port interests seem to have been normalized, judging from a pricing agreement reached in 1907 between the ports of Strasbourg, Ludwigshafen, Speyer, Mannheim, Karlsruhe and Kehl (Letter from the Mayor of Strasbourg to the Commissaire général of 30/8/1919). The influence German interests exerted in the Port of Strasbourg, with regard to industry and transport, highlights clearly that the "hostility" directed at Alsace should be reconsidered from the standpoint of a federal political system.

Hopes and fears in Strasbourg in relation to French management

When the French authorities re-took control of Alsace in late 1918, the municipal management of the port was still functional, even after the removal of its German staff. However, the port installations had deteriorated due to a lack of maintenance during the war, and there was a marked reduction in traffic which had been diverted to Kehl. The decree of 7 July 1919 temporarily made the Commissariat général d'Alsace-Lorraine directly responsible for the management of the municipal Port of Strasbourg (AM – 42 MW1) and the Commissariat appointed a new director in the summer of 1919, M. Detoef⁶, a civil engineer who was also a graduate of Ecole Polytechnique (in 1902). Thus began an intermediate period

⁶ He remained in this post until 1923, when he became the director of Thomson-Houston which became Alsthom in 1928, when it merged with part of the Société Alsacienne de Constructions Mécaniques (SACM) based in Mulhouse and Belfort. He was replaced as director of the port by Gaston Haelling, also a graduate of Ecole Polytechnique and a senior civil engineer.

where the municipal operating rules and the port police were kept in place with a director appointed by the French authorities who was in charge of the Ports of Strasbourg and Kehl as the latter's installations were under French control in the framework of the singly international body that managed both Strasbourg and Kehl (Article 65 of the Treaty of Versailles).

While the development of port installations was a necessity, it would be almost unimaginable to create a second port in Strasbourg which was completely separate from the existing municipal port. As a single management solution was therefore required, the next step was to define the legal form of the new entity and the respective responsibilities of the supervisory authorities. We have seen above how the status of autonomous seaport provided a model which could then be adapted to local conditions. The city would be unswerving in its desire to give both partners strictly equal treatment, while the representatives of the State attempted to assert the dominance of the central authority. The discussions surrounding the future status of the port, like the texts themselves and the attempts to make use of existing frameworks meant that this desire to control continued to manifest itself well after the 1924 Act was ratified. The French authorities were categorical: only the State had the capacity to defend the general interest as explained to the Senate by the Rapporteur of the Act setting up the port: *“If we were to leave the city of Strasbourg with complete control over the future of the port it would inevitably lead to the dominance of local interests”* or, again, defending the action of the State *“in accordance with the interests of the whole country under the same conditions that apply to other commercial seaports”* (M. Milan, rapporteur of the A to the Senate, 3/4/1924). In the French political imagination, the State plays a dominant role in decision-making, as it is the only entity that can represent the general interest. In this connection, the Minister for Public Works will have the indirect right to monitor all the decisions taken by the board of directors.

In a muted manner, but straight away, the city authorities restated its prerogatives with regard to operation and management of the port. In a letter he sent to the Commissaire général in 1921, Jacques Peirotte, the Mayor of Strasbourg, complained about the *“serious encroachment on the rights of the city of Strasbourg”* which were guaranteed by the municipal legislation as municipal property (*Privateigentum der Stadt*). This deep attachment to the port was also expressed in deeds. Until 1925, the City of Strasbourg gave its unconditional support to its port through large investments in new installations which it funded with the State. It also acquired sequestered port assets from German firms and placed

them at the disposal of the Port. In addition it purchased the installations of Lauterbourg downstream, which was a useful point at which to lighten barges when water levels were low. In addition, it invested in the equity of towing firms. Finally, the municipal budget covered the port's current operating deficits in the immediate period after the war before the accounts were balanced as traffic began to increase again.

Another issue was the government's intention of imposing the presence of the Prefect on the new Board of Directors, as was the case in Bordeaux and Le Havre. The municipality refused this, for fear that port affairs would be dominated by political and administrative attitudes. On the same grounds it also wished to refuse the participation of a Mayor if he had been elected to the National Assembly (Deputy or Senator). This stipulation was ultimately rejected by the Legal Committee. The government, informed by Alexandre Millerand, was aware of the City's attachment to its port and at the end of the day was ready to recognise Strasbourg's specific rights and make a commitment to provide equivalent investment (Act of 26 April 1924 establishing the Autonomous Port of Strasbourg). The financial terms had already been established in the agreement of 20 May 1923. The Decree of 16 November fixed 1/1/1926 as the date for the official creation of the new body.

After this, as by law the consent of the city of Strasbourg was necessary before any change could be introduced, it was able defend itself against any attempt to fit the port into an existing framework (Public State Institution or Industrial or Commercial Establishment). The City Council struggled to keep the management of the Port independent from political influence, giving priority to commercial and industrial interests and trying to protect the port from administrative rules that threatened to halt its development. It therefore drew the attention of legislators to the need, in order to be competitive, for freedom in the areas of decision-making and pricing with considerable success.

The municipality fully understood the potential benefits of the new situation. Far from merely reacting, it took an active role in improving installations and campaigned for a status similar to that of a free port (Schmauch, 2011). It was a stakeholder in structures set up by the French public authorities such as the Société d'études pour la navigation du Rhin (Society for navigation studies on the Rhine), la Société régionale d'étude pour la mise en valeur du Rhin (regional society for studies to promote the Rhine) - energy, irrigation, navigation. The city of Strasbourg gave priority to the commercial value and economic leadership provided by the port, which it considered from the entrepreneurial point of view, unlike the State which saw

the port as a facility in a larger regional system. Although the two points of view are opposition, they are not incompatible as shown by the statutes and the operation of the autonomous port. The tensions that could be feared from the two different visions of port management did not give rise to any problems.

The port's status incorporated management flexibility that was influenced by the limited partnerships of the German ports, which made it possible to provide a return on invested capital. Amongst other things, the port authority was able to align its port costs on those that prevailed in the Rhine market without preliminary political or administrative agreement (from a ministry or Parliament). Thus, the new structure, which was approved by the Chamber of Commerce (on 11/9/1924) and Strasbourg City Council (on 19/1/1925), calmed some fears about administrative red tape. In return, the accounts of the autonomous port had to be checked by the city of Strasbourg⁷. They were then submitted to the Ministry of Public Works the Ministry of Finance for approval. During the entire period in question the archives show that all the accounts were accepted without discussion.

The form of the single management structure for Strasbourg and Kehl (1920 – 1927)

On the grounds of the unfair treatment the Port and the City of Strasbourg had received under the Second German Reich and the diversion of traffic to Kehl during the war, France obtained the temporary right to manage the port installations at Kehl, for the time it took to carry out the enlargement works at Strasbourg (Article 65 of the Treaty of Versailles). The Franco-German agreement (*Deutsch-französisches Abkommen über den Kehler Hafen*) of 16/4/1920 identified two zones of operation which also delimited the customs areas (Fig.6): zone A which was left to the German administration and zone B which was placed under direct French management, overseen by the Central Rhine Navigation Commission.

While, legally, the entire port zone was under French control, day-to-day management was conducted on the basis of the existing rules. This obliged the Germans not to discriminate against French operators. Germany was responsible for the routine maintenance of the installations, both in the case of access by river (dredging) and land (roads and railways). This is an important point, in particular as regards rail services to the quays which were provided by the Badenese railway company at no charge. The French manager's role was more that of

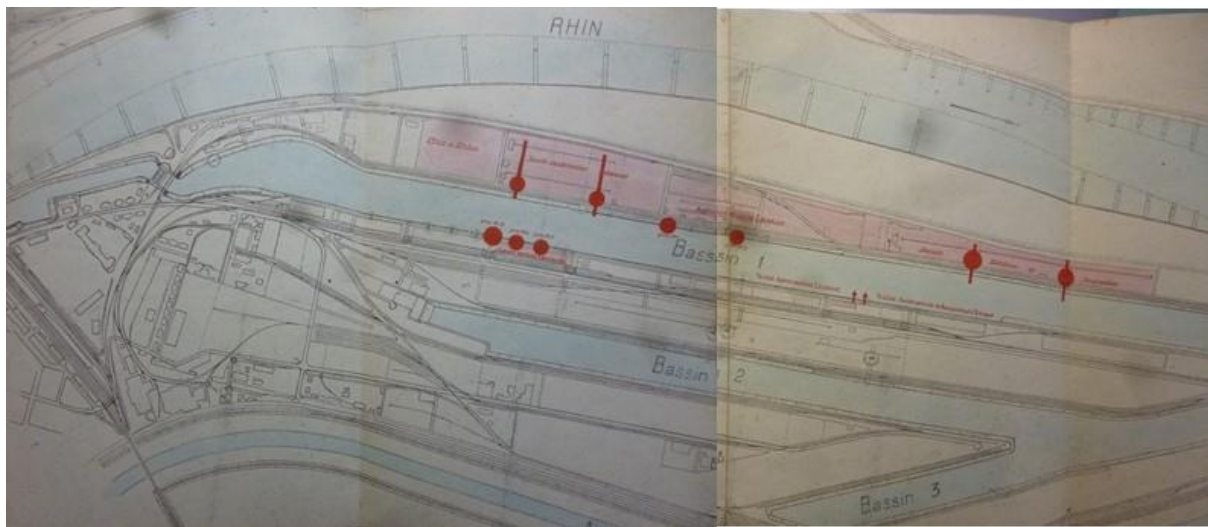
⁷ Even during the Second World War, bizarrely, contacts were maintained between the municipality in exile in Perrigueux (Dordogne) and the Manager of the Autonomous Port in the Hotel Carlton in Vichy, mainly in connection with the management of displaced staff and the payment of pensions.

an administrator with extended powers who made sure that the port charges were strictly aligned on those of Strasbourg in order to prevent any pricing competition. The clear separation between the budgets of the two ports was intended to avoid any German political interference by allocating a fixed sum for the port installations at Kehl.

As no more vacant land was available in the port of Kehl, German players had to move in order to make space for French ones. The plan was to move German players out temporarily for which France would pay them damages. The eviction indemnities were estimated at 3.2 Million Francs at the time, which the German administration had to pay in advance awaiting reimbursement at a later date as part of the overall payment of reparations. The transfer involved four gantry cranes and four conveyor belts, 13,000 m² of warehouses, 25,000 m³ of silos and a number of quayside areas. France was not interested in installing processing facilities to control the entire port and all its land, but just in having the cargo handling facilities, the lengths of quay and the surfaces required to meet Strasbourg's needs. The three kilometres of quayside under French management were to account for approximately 20% of total traffic in 1922 and 15% still in 1925 (Nonn, 1980).

Due to a lack of staff and experience, management of the land and the workers in charge of the equipment was delegated to the City of Strasbourg. The manager of the two ports maintained his monitoring and arbitration role. A particular concern of his was to prevent the French presence on the right bank from becoming permanent. The French players therefore had to make the commitment to move their activities back to France and to confine new investment to dismountable equipment. France made use of the possibility of prolonging the single management regime provided for under the Treaty of Versailles and granted by the Central Rhine Navigation Commission. It extended its presence for a year and half, from 10/1/1927 to 10/7/1928, partially withdrawing before the deadline.

Figure 6. Installations in the Port of Kehl under temporary French control (1919-1927).
Departmental Archives of Bas-Rhin.



The urgency of works in the port of Strasbourg (financial charges and phases of construction)

In order to carry out France's programme for the Rhine, it was essential to equip the French side of the river with the appropriate port facilities as rapidly as possible. The draft project for the extension was drawn up as early as September 1921. It involved two phases of construction. The first gave the port rapidly a capacity of 6.5 million tonnes. The doubling of the existing 10km of quays (the junction basin, oil dock and internal canal) was to be funded by the State with the cost of doubling the rail infrastructure being shared with the Alsace-Lorraine network. The second phase would allow the port to handle 10 million tonnes at a later date and would be paid for by the Autonomous Port. This involved digging out six basins and was not carried out until after 1945.

In order for each stakeholder to make a similar investment, the City was willing to transfer some of its assets⁸ to the new body. It also made a commitment to make the land necessary for future extensions available. It was still allowed to oversee the development of the Port, which had to be compatible with the City's development plan. The decision to make the major extension to the south had the advantage that it did not present any technical difficulties. The

⁸ In particular the sequestered installations that had had been bought back from German interests such as the Strasbourg and Lauterbourg terminals.

land was already owned by public entities (the City and the State) and had the advantage of being near working-class districts that could provide the future workforce (Trinquet, 1953). The works needed to be started urgently in order to be able to cope with the anticipated increase in traffic and return the Kehl installations within the allotted time span. In view of the scale of the works, they were given priority and expected to begin very quickly. The City volunteered to manage the works on behalf of the State, on the grounds of its greater flexibility and better local knowledge (Letter from the Mayor to the Commissaire Général d’Alsace-Lorraine dated 8/7/1924 - 59J2). The State declined this offer as it wished to play a leading role, which did not prevent it from drawing on municipal expertise from time to time.

The works started even before the final legal structures were validated and consequently drew on the municipal budget and that of the State (Table 1). They involved upgrading the port entrance (1921) and digging the Remparts dock (1921-23). Finally, in August 1922, the full draft project for the extension was adopted and validated by the Act passed on 26/4/1924. In this context, the State, applying the autonomous seaport model, made a commitment to pay half the initial expenses, finance the oil dock and partly pay for the railways installations and the junction railway line, with the Alsace-Lorraine railway company paying for the rest, including the construction of warehouses and the provision of equipment (Table 2).

Table 1. Distribution of financial commitments prior to 1923 – without land (Bill No. 6041 - 1923)

	City	State	Other	Total (Francs)
Northern outer harbour	27%	73%	0%	4,772,564
Rempart dock	31%	34%	35% ⁹	2,069,898
Marshalling yard	0%	0%	100% ¹⁰	7,170,000

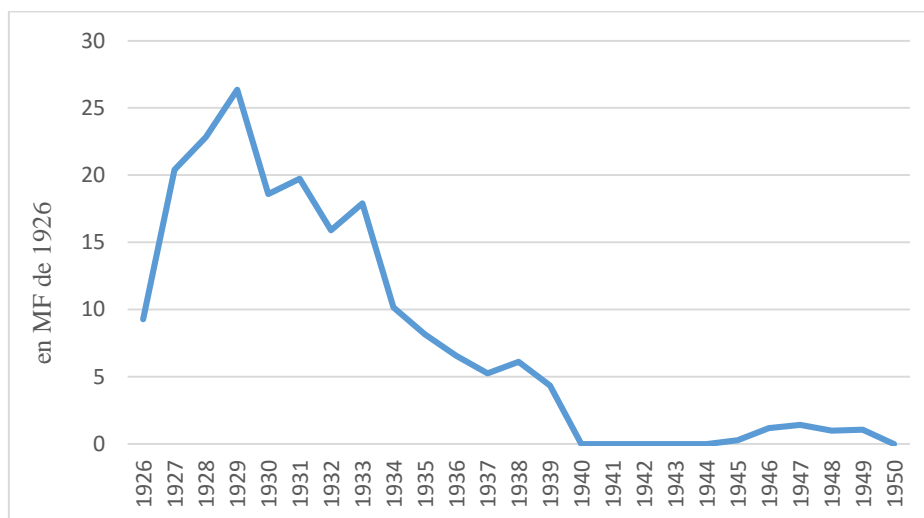
Table 2. Distribution of financial commitments for the extension of the Autonomous Port of Strasbourg after 1923 – without land (Bill No. 6041 - 1923)

⁹ Sequestered coal installations
¹⁰ Alsace-Lorraine rail network

Value in Francs (1923)	Port Installations	port installations	railway installations	Payable by
Phase 1	168,140,000	100,790,000	67,350,000	State
Phase 2	78,700,000	67,700,000	11,000,000	Autonomous Port

Based on the available data (Trinquier 1951), we can see that the 121 million Francs of funding from the State is fairly close to the City of Strasbourg’s contribution, assessed at 110 million Francs in 1923 constant Francs. In the first two years, as the State had no budgetary resources available within the timeframe, it negotiated a financial advance from the City of Strasbourg and the Chamber of Commerce¹¹. After 1926, and until 1950, funding to cover the continuation of works was provided from the budget of the Ministry of Public Works (Fig.7).

Figure 7. Funding of the extension of the Port of Strasbourg from the budget of the Ministry of Public Works (Data from Trinquier and INSEE)



Compared to the investment, the results seem disappointing. Only a small fraction of the new zones that were improved at the end of the 1920s was occupied. Excessively high rents may perhaps have been partly to blame, but the economic difficulties of the 1930s were more

¹¹ This was the sum of 4 Million Francs at an interest rate of 5%. Reimbursement began in and 1926 and was completed at the end of 1931. The municipality had in fact attempted to borrow the money abroad, in the United States and the Netherlands (through the city of Rotterdam, on terms which were very much in that city’s interests and which made the issuing of loans conditional on the abolition of warehousing charges which put the Dutch at a disadvantage to the Belgians). The government informed the city that it could raise several debts that could be paid off over a 30 year period which would be easily obtained from the public sector in the case of a regional economic project of this type”.

certainly involved, as subsequently was the freezing of major industrial investment because of the growing danger arising from the proximity of Nazi Germany (Nonn, 1980). The zones in question were not to be filled until the strong economic recovery that occurred after 1945.

Conclusion. Institutional cross- pollination in a border zone port system

The change in Strasbourg's status from that of a municipal port on the Rhine to that of an Autonomous Port was the outcome of a global geopolitical upheaval which gave Strasbourg's port installations a central role for the French presence on the Rhine. It gave lasting institutional and physical expression to the creation of a new balance of power, not only between France and Germany, but also between the French State and the municipality of Strasbourg. The port of Strasbourg was thus expected to become the linchpin of a transport system that was capable of guaranteeing France's long-term autonomy on the Rhine. The goal was to become as free as possible from German influence, by nationalising the capital invested in the port (either by confiscation or by purchasing enemy industrial interests), by creating a merchant fleet under the French flag, and by obtaining a presence at five Rhine ports and the port Antwerp which belonged to France's Belgian ally.

In view of the issues involved and the presence of a traditionally centralising authority (the French State), the City of Strasbourg was afraid of losing control of its port, which had cost it a great deal financially and in terms of political effort. The converging interests of the State and the City nevertheless made it possible to arrive at a mode of management that reconciled the higher interests of the State with the municipal authority's attachment to its port. The status of Autonomous Port thus involved cross-pollination, that of a river port that wishes to acquire a fiscal status normally reserved to seaports, the combination of control by a centralizing State and a local authority, and finally the long-term interaction between the neighbouring and competing ports of Strasbourg and Kehl on either side of the border whose institutions have constantly interacted in the course of conflicts and military occupations (Zander, 2002), but also in the framework of the development of closer ties during peacetime, the different stages in which deserve further attention.

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