



Activity Report 2007-2008-2009

Introduction

The third SSS business plan was launched in 2007. The purely promotional aspects – i.e. explaining what shortsea shipping is about – are no longer a substantial part of that third business plan. Since the establishment of the promotion centre in 1998 shortsea shipping has become sufficiently well-known through all kinds of actions and publications.

The Shortsea Promotion Centre Flanders has manifested itself continuously as a neutral and non-commercial go-between, by bringing people together, by approaching the market in a proactive way using practical examples and by using networking to deal with the industry's queries in an accurate manner. Over the years the promotion centre has developed into the main contact and knowledge centre for shortsea shipping, among other things thanks to its strong communication towards the market players and the target groups.

When drafting the business plan the SSS working group, which steers the promotion centre, has opted for a division into a “continuous policy” section and a “specific projects” section.

“Continuous policy” includes:

- market prospection using active fieldwork
- communication that supports market prospection and also has a European dimension
- management activities using practical “tools” such as the liner services database
- bottlenecks
- local and European networking
- the influx of youngsters

“Specific projects” includes:

- market prospecting projects with Euronationals, workshops...
- communication about ships’ types, emissions etc.
- shortsea hub
- influx of youngsters via, for instance, European 2^e3s projects
- actions in connection with the 10th anniversary of the centre in 2008

A. Continuous policy

1. Market prospection

As a promotion centre we try as much as possible to make contact with the market players, in particular industry/shipping, logistics partners and road haulage companies. Press articles and releases, tips, mailing lists etc., are used as sources for a first contact by phone or e-mail. The use of best practices – with the consent of the parties concerned – has expanded considerably and examples are now also passed on by the market itself. This clearly constitutes a win-win situation, as the promotion centre uses these examples to convince others and, at the same time, the company involved gains some commercial publicity.

It has been a deliberate choice to focus, from 2007 onward, on the SMEs (small and medium enterprises), of which there are an estimated 23 million active in the EU, which constitutes a considerable potential. Through its contacts the promotion centre has noticed that in many of these SMEs there still is a lack of knowledge about transport and logistics. There are instances where a sales department sells a project and afterwards their logistics colleagues are facing practical transport problems. On that background the promotion centre has developed, in 2009, its own online liner services database, tailored to the individual shippers and including readily available information about the SSS possibilities. Thus not only the shippers, but also their logistics staff and the forwarding agents, have a tool at their disposal which allows them to create an inter- or multimodal transport chain.

The nature of the queries varies. Until the start of our online database, the information about the SSS liner services was taken from our internal database and delivered to the inquirer. Many queries concerned charterers and forwarding agents: after the restyling and upgrade of our website www.shortsea.be at the beginning of 2008, those companies could be looked up via a search engine under “SSS players”. Other questions concerned such items as emissions, ships’ types, European support measures (primarily Marco Polo), data about the dimensions of containers etc. If we don’t have the answer readily available, we will search among our network contacts.

The queries arrive through various channels: telephone, e-mail etc. If the contact proves to be interesting, a visit is arranged. All queries, contacts and visits are stored in a database and the files are followed up subsequently.

In the context of market prospection the promotion centre takes part in workshops, conferences and trade fairs, where often very concrete questions are asked. This takes place either by simply participating or visiting the venue, or by actively organising a workshop or being present at a trade fair stand.

2007: participation in the “Dynamic Day” for SMEs, workshops of Flanders Investment and Trade, the Shortsea Conference in Bruges (November), the Inland Terminals Conference in Antwerp (November) etc. At the Transport & Logistics trade fair in Antwerp (September) we occupied a stand together with the Inland Navigation Promotion Centre. Together with the promotion centre in Finland and with the cooperation of Flanders Investment and Trade and the Flemish Logistics Institute, we also organised workshops in Helsinki and Kotka (June).

2008: participation in the ro-ro conference and trade fair in Göteborg (May), the Bruges Enterprise Trade Fair, the Antwerp B2B Exchange for SMEs, the Rhine-Scheldt Delta workshop etc. In October we ourselves organised an “SMEs and shortsea shipping” workshop which attracted more than 100 participants.

2009: participation in the trade fair “Doing business with SMEs”, SIL Barcelona (June), shortsea conferences in Liverpool (July) and Bruges (October). We also actively participated in a “Shippers’ Day” workshop organised by OTM (the Belgian association of shippers) and together with the Dutch office we organised a workshop in Ghent on “SSS and intermodality” (110 participants – June). We were also present with a stand at two trade fairs: Transport & Logistics in Munich (May) and Antwerp (October).

Together with the Inland Navigation Promotion Centre practice-oriented seminars were organised in 2008 and 2009 in cooperation with VOKA branches (Chambers of Commerce) in several Flemish provinces. All in all they attracted more than 300 interested individuals.

Meanwhile it remains a difficult task to attract the shippers to these events. The workshop in Ghent (June 2008) has been the most successful in that respect with 43% participants from our first three target groups (shippers, logistics and road haulage). The formula with many practical examples clearly caught on.

Shortsea shipping is, by definition, part of a larger transport chain, often organised as a door-to-door operation (especially in the case of containers). The promotion centre has promoted these door-to-door transports by offering, for instance, practical examples.

At the request of the European Commission a number of promotion centres have transformed themselves into “intermodal” promotion centres, often together with rail transport but also with inland navigation. In Flanders this is already the case with the Inland Navigation Promotion Centre Flanders. A number of contacts have been made with the railroads, e.g. through “intermodal workshops”, but because of a different policy level and a more complicated structure at the railroads, these contacts are more arduous. Therefore, the decision was made in the working group to focus on concrete projects (e.g. transshipment points).

2. Communication

A large part of our communication is intended to support market prospection.

2.1 Newsletter

The newsletter is our strongest means of communication. It is published 4 times a year in a Dutch (5,350 copies) and an English (1,250 copies) version. A limited survey has shown that the newsletter is passed on 2,5 times on average within a company and that it therefore is read by 16,500 persons. As far as the contents are concerned, a balance is sought between “best practices”, information about new liner services, policy, events etc.

2.2 E-news

The number of unique readers who actually read the e-news has steadily increased to 600 or 22% of the 2,700 addressees. In 2008 the layout has been adapted following the restyling of our website. It is an excellent means to pass on the information that becomes available between the publication dates of the printed newsletter.

2.3 Country specials

In 2007 a digital update was made of the specials on Portugal, Finland and Greece. Afterwards preference was given to other publications such as “SSS in 12 best practices” and the brochure and poster on “Europe as Flanders’ hinterland” (see below).

2.4 Website

When googling for “shortsea shipping” or “shortsea” the first three and first two items respectively appear to be links to www.shortsea.be. The website constitutes quite often the first introduction to shortsea and the promotion centre.

At the beginning of 2008 the entire website has been revamped and complemented with a number of new sections. The “Youngsters” section has been expanded with a view to their “influx”, a database with search engine was introduced for the benefit of shippers and forwarding agents, the news section was enlarged etc. In October 2009 the online database of SSS liner services, which included a search engine, was launched. News items, events, publications are all posted on the website, which therefore makes regular consultation worthwhile.

We try to get as much as possible links to our own website incorporated in other websites, in particular of the umbrella organisations of the industry.

Consultation of the website: average 200 unique visitors per day.

2.5 Press releases

The press releases concern the annual and biannual SSS traffic figures. Also special events (the organisation of a workshop), the celebration of the 10th anniversary and the launching of the online liner services database have been announced through press releases, sometimes in combination with a press conference, as was the case with the race between a truck and a ship (2008). That race was mentioned in 15 different articles and also surfaced at later conferences.

2.6 Advertising campaigns/editorials

It is important to remain in the limelight. Using the new campaign image of the “Channel Swimmer”, as from the middle of 2008 the advertising effort was mainly directed towards magazines aimed at shippers and logistics companies. The number of advertisements in the specialised maritime press diminished and they focused mainly on special issues such as “Shortsea”, the “Transport & Logistics” trade fair issues etc. The advertisements are spread over the year and are placed in market-oriented publications that also publish our editorial contributions.



The editorial articles covered such subjects as the traffic figures, the truck-ship race, the online database, the new website (2008) etc. We notice that certain information from our printed newsletter or e-news is taken up also.

2.7 General and European

Our e-news messages are also published on the ESN website, as are the announcements of the workshops we organise in cooperation with other promotion centres. Each year a report about the activities of the promotion centre is drafted and included in ESN’s annual report. An “international” press communiqué is issued in that respect also.

The promotion centre regularly gives presentations at workshops and conferences (both national and international), before business clubs, groups of companies, port missions, economic delegations etc.

3. Bottlenecks and policy preparation

The European “bottleneck exercise” is the subject of a follow-up, in cooperation with the Focal Points. The local bottlenecks (customs controls of sea-river vessels towards the Albert Canal, the aircraft under the bridges on our waterways etc.) continue to receive attention.

On the occasion of the Flemish regional elections in June 2009 the promotion centre presented a memorandum with points of particular interest to SSS.

4. Networking

For more than 10 years the promotion centre has manifested itself as a neutral, non-commercial go-between. Networking as such is of crucial importance to us because the information obtained through contacts works as a support for both market prospection and communication. Issues are often solved with the input or examples from the Flemish, Belgian and European networks.

To bolster its market prospection the promotion centre regularly participates in activities and organisations of VOKA (Chambers of Commerce), Unizo, VKW, Flanders Investment and Trade, POM, OTM (Belgian shippers’ association), business clubs (WTC, A12...). Often this involves the participation of SMEs. The participation in trade fairs such as Transport & Logistics in Antwerp offers an opportunity to meet many people in a short span (2007 and 2009). Within Flanders Port Area the promotion centre takes part in the working group Market Prospection.

The SSS working group that steers the promotion centre also includes a large number of representative organisations boasting the necessary expertise.

As far as policymaking is concerned, there are contacts with the Flemish authorities, federal agencies, the provinces, Flemish MPs etc. The embassies and consulates in or of SSS countries get information on a regular basis too, e.g. through our newsletter.

As SSS is, by definition, a cross-border transport mode, networking on the European level has also developed considerably. The promotion centre participates in the MIF (Maritime Industries Forum) and has good contacts with ECSA, ESPO etc. Obviously there are regular contacts with the European Commission and the Focal Points (1-2 times a year).

The promotion centre was also present at meetings with delegations from Tallinn, Gijon and Latvia (2007) and of Morocco (2009) which focused on ports, transport and logistics.

Participation in port missions is discussed in the SSS working group. Thus the promotion centre took part in the port day in London (2007) organised by the port of

Antwerp. In the framework of the Flanders Port Area (FPA) the promotion centre occupied a stand jointly with the Flemish ports at the Transport trade fair in Munich (2009). The promotion centre actively participates in the FPA working group "Structural Consultation on Ports".

The promotion centre was present at international conferences in Bruges (Shortsea conference) and Antwerp (Inland terminals) in 2007, in Amsterdam in 2008, in Liverpool and Bruges (Shortsea), at SIL (Barcelona) and the 3PL Summit (Brussels) in 2009. Wherever possible substantive contributions are made to programmes (Shortsea Bruges 2007 and 2009), sometimes including a presentation.

The promotion centre plays an active part in the European Shortsea Network, of which it was one of the founders in 2000. Despite the financial difficulties a number of promotion centres experience, the cooperation is constructive and practical. As mentioned before, joint workshops have been organised with Finland (2007) and the Netherlands (2009). In the 2^e3s project the Flemish promotion centre was instrumental by involving the colleges of Logistics in 2008 and 2009.

For the MEPs of the Transport Committee the European Shortsea Network also organises an information session, the practical realisation of which was carried out by Flanders and Holland. This information session took place in 2007, but due to circumstances it was cancelled in 2008. In 2009 it was decided to postpone the session on account of the European elections. In June 2009 the Flemish newcomers (substitutes) in the Transport Committee received an information pack from the promotion centre.

5. Influx – training

It is of crucial importance for the future architects of the intermodal transport to become acquainted with shortsea.

The section "Youngsters' Corner" on the website has been updated and extended in 2008.

Each year SSS presentations are given in the framework of the ITMMA courses in Antwerp and the Port Management course in Ghent (also for professionals) as well as in the colleges of Logistics.

There are regular contacts with the Port Centre Lillo, where an information stand has been installed.

In 2009 the promotion centre co-sponsored a ship simulator in the interactive centre Hidrodoe, to bring 10- to 12-year-olds in contact with ships in a playful manner.

In the spring of 2008 the promotion centre organised an information session about the 2^e3s project in the Port Centre Lillo, aimed at the colleges of Logistics. Apparently with success, because both in 2008 and 2009 some 110 students took part in the practical shortsea course on board the Barcelona-Civitavecchia ferry (see below).

B. Specific projects

1. Market prospection

In order to illustrate SSS in a practical way the idea of “goods/cargo specials” resulted in an introductory brochure containing general information and 12 practical examples concerning various types of goods. This brochure was used for the first time in the VOKA sessions in cooperation with the Inland Navigation Promotion Centre (2008-2009) and afterwards at trade fairs and in workshops.

Specific workshops have been organised for SMEs (2008) and on the subject of “Intermodality and SSS: it actually works!” (2009).

To demonstrate the European dimension, the hinterland so to speak, of SSS in Flanders and of the Flemish ports, a brochure entitled “Europe is the hinterland of Flanders via SSS” has been produced (2008), in keeping with the Flemish prime minister’s idea of a “Flanders Port Area”. Around the same idea a poster has been developed also, on which the possibilities of SSS are shown in a number of pictures.

Together with other promotion centres companies that create important flows of goods on a European scale (“Euronationals”) have been approached.

Meanwhile, the absence of reliable European statistics that would allow to chart the flow of goods for the various modes, remains an important obstacle.

2. Communication

The communication on the subject “For each type of cargo there’s always a suitable (SSS) vessel available” has been carried out using practical examples in presentations, workshops, the brochure containing the 12 best practices and the “Hinterland” brochure, and involving the different types of vessel. Innovations, new concepts etc. are also made known through our communication channels in order to show that the shortsea industry responds to the evolving market.

The promotion centre tries to induce as many companies as possible to allow their best practices to be used in its communication towards the market. These examples are an ideal tool to create a mental shift amongst the potential shortsea users. Of course, confidentiality is guaranteed and, if so requested, the examples are not used.

The “emissions” issue regularly surfaces in the news items published. In the case of the race between a truck and a ship (2008), for instance, an analysis was made by Transport & Mobility Leuven on the basis of the actual data collected from the drivers of the trucks and the captain of the ship. For the first time it was demonstrated, not in a computer simulation but with actual figures, that SSS scores better on CO₂ than road haulage. As far as SO₂, Nox and PM particles are concerned, a catch-up operation is on the way involving international measures which in coming years will push back emissions even further. As mentioned before, that race has regularly been referred to in subsequent workshops and conferences and it also met with a wide response in the press.

3. Shortsea hub

A number of items discussed in the “shortsea terminal” workshop in Schelle (2006) are still relevant: labour flexibility in ports, the “dedicated” terminal etc. The latter is also mentioned in the “European Common Maritime Space Without Barriers” and in the Flemish coalition agreement (2009). The promotion centre has been following those issues from the start and has mentioned them explicitly in its presentations and workshops.

Also, such issues as the port access costs, in particular the pilotage dues, are being closely followed, inter alia via reporting to the SSS working group.

4. Influx/training

In 2008 and 2009 the promotion centre has actively contributed to the 2^e3s project, e.g. by ensuring the participation of 7 colleges of Logistics and by organising presentations during the trip. Thanks to that practical introduction to SSS quite a number of students have begun to see “intermodal” transports in a different perspective.

The extension of the youngsters’ section on the website was carried out during the update of the website in 2008.

The promotion centre has always stated that too little attention is paid to ports, transport, logistics etc in the final attainment levels. However, the Flemish administration has meanwhile developed a logistics teaching package which has been introduced in 2010.

It remains of the utmost importance to continue to focus on the awareness of the young target group, a number of whom will enter the transport, maritime or logistics industry and become the future architects of intermodal transport.

5. 2008: 10th anniversary

The 10th anniversary offered an excellent opportunity to put the promotion centre and its activities in the limelight:

- * a number of communication channels were upgraded (website, newsletter, e-news)
- * a specific communication campaign was launched in magazines en periodicals
- * a workshop was organised
- * the road/shortsea race received a lot of attention
- * a shortsea award has been attributed to a company which had shown itself to be particularly shortsea-friendly
- * a shortsea Ambassador has been chosen

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