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Superyacht and megayacht moorings

By Oscar Siches*



Super and megayachts (let's just refer to them as big yachts) are associated with ultimate luxury, style, power and high income for the marina. All this is, in most cases, true. However, I would like to share with you some thoughts about a few issues I consider very important to evaluate before starting a project for berthing big yachts at any marina.

How to look at them

A big yacht should not be considered as 'a yacht that is so many times bigger than a small yacht'. This concept is totally wrong and leads to serious mistakes when designing a marina and planning its operation.

A big yacht is an entity in which complexity grows in an exponential (and not linear) way in respect to the LOA. They are a mix of a big floating house, sometimes big floating lodging complexes, small factory, navy posting, fancy restaurant and spa. As we all know, in our Planet Earth we tend to separate those operations, particularly the factory and navy ones from the other, but in our Planet Water they all fall under the glitzy big yacht umbrella. Add to that the fact that each and every superyacht is its own world apart and you start having some serious facts to consider.

What does a marina lose when allocating space?

Mooring: Mooring space required

for a big yacht only starts with the allocated water surface. That's where the yacht floats while secured to the land and here we have the first source of misunderstandings: mooring size versus yacht size. A yacht of, say, 30 m LOA x 8 m beam does not fit on a 30 m x 8 m mooring. Fenders, platforms, pulpit, extended gangway allowance and safety margin dictates that a minimum of 10% extra space above those measurements should always be considered necessary. This applies (with slight differences of course) for all types of land/pontoon moorings: alongside and stern-to with and without fenders.

Manoeuvring area: This is the harbour's common area for the movement of yachts approaching and departing the moorings. Its design (as per most rules and laws of different countries) is based on the type and size of the largest yacht on the water adjacent to the mooring (harbours can have different basins with different manoeuvring area needs). Obviously, the largest manoeuvring area is, in most cases, next to the harbour entrance. A single big yacht mooring will make necessary that all that manoeuvring area is reserved for the purpose. This can be a waste of water surface resources.

Use of space on land: The tendency is to think immediately of car parking places needed. In most cases, road traffic flow is as important. First of

all, it is directly linked to emergency situations and possible evacuation of the site, which at all times should be considered as the top priority.

Big yachts generate an enormous flow of traffic, both in season and while Wintering at their home port. Crew, technical services, supplies and victuals make a constant daily use of the access roads to the yacht. Short visits from service companies and suppliers are usual, parking places are never enough and the 'just a couple minutes' and 'won't be a second' phrases while leaving the vehicles to interrupt traffic flow remain a constant fact of life.

Visual Impact: Yachts (particularly sailing yachts) are associated with beauty. Still, those big, tall structures will affect the marina landscape. Placing the yachts bow to or sideways to the main point of perspective can make a difference, both for the marina as well as for the surrounding area (waterfront homes, dockside restaurants, beaches, promenades, etc).

Yacht needs in transit...

Manoeuvring: Easy access and mooring procedures, achieved by proper manoeuvring areas and dock/water assistance, are an important matter. Guests on arriving yachts want to go ashore as soon as possible and so does the crew in order to have the yacht for themselves and take a 'working rest'.

Victuals: Hundreds of kilos of victuals are requested and loaded frequently. It is impossible to carry everything onboard and guest mind-reading is a technique which is only in the early stages of development. Chefs are known to jump to the pier while the yacht is still few metres off and dash to the markets looking totally possessed. Vans, taxis and rented cars to carry the supplies will add to the marina traffic. Unloading will block the small traffic access lanes to the moorings.

Access: Walking 500 m to the nearest marina entrance, difficulties for taxis



Facilities for Superyachts

to enter and find the yacht, "We are from the big yacht," explanation at the gate are situations that could be resolved at the design stage.

Waste disposal: A 40 m yacht on active duty generates a good 500 litres of garbage per day. Suitable containers or a collection service should be provided.

Car Parking: Transit yachts mostly use taxis or chauffeured services.

...and in their home port

Power/water: While a yacht in transit will usually keep the generators running (big supply needed, cumbersome connection/disconnection procedure), it expects to be able to obtain shore power for long periods at the marina. Yachts are using water filters and softeners (decalcifying) that occupy space ashore. Cables and equipment end up tied down (or around) the service bollards which, in most cases, are not designed to take such a load.

Parking: Cars and bicycles of crew members are used every day and parking for them is necessary.

Privacy: There is a lot to do on a big

yacht during the non-active times. Answering the usual questions such as "Who is the owner?" and the "How much does this yacht cost?" as well as granting or denying permission to take the holiday picture next to the gangway is wasted time that can be reduced if the marina access control provides some privacy.

Access: Suppliers and service providers will be constantly visiting the boat. Organised access by an ID system or notifying the access control will save both yacht and marina personnel a lot of time.

Locker/Storeroom: Just remember last time you moved home. All those things that had been accumulated through the years and now kept filling up the removal van. A yacht is worse. A good size storeroom (50 sq m for a 40 m yacht) is certain to be used and much appreciated.

Who is the client?

The might and beauty of a big yacht is immediately associated with its owner, but owners of big yachts do not take care of everyday yacht business. They do not do the paperwork,

book marinas or connect the power supply lines. They do not even pay the bills. Owners (or their guests) are occasionally seen at the marina restaurants or shops. Yacht visits do not last more than few days.

The crew at a home port marina is there for some 300 days a year. They use the marina, bars, restaurants, local shops and services. They interact with and become part of the community. They also have daily contact with the marina staff. On most big yachts, it is the Captain's view which carries most weight when deciding where to spend the Winter months.

When I help to design a marina berthing big yachts, I always think of the crew's needs.

What do they want?

Please note that I have mentioned needs before. This point is not about needs, it is about wishes.

I have been thinking a lot about this, discussed with clients, colleagues and friends and arrived to the conclusion that what the crew (client) wants is understanding and recognition of their jobs.



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Today, big yacht crews are in general certified yachting professionals. They have a lot of experience. Captains are totally responsible for their crew, guests and yachts. Nobody knows their boats better than themselves and that virtue should be recognised.

While on active service they all live in a special limbo between the real world and a virtual one. Sometimes, this is taken as snobbishness on their part (it does exist as in all other occupations in life), but it should be seen as a characteristic of that special environment that is a big yacht. Marina personnel should try to accommodate their sometimes seemingly ridiculous needs and, in return, yacht crews should acknowledge the apparent limitations of the real world. In this way, a consensus of understanding can be reached and any communication problems resolved without conflict.

The future

Developments in the marina industry are much slower than the ones currently being achieved in yacht design and construction. Marinas generally react on strictly necessary requirements there being no such a thing as an innovation trend.

I suggest we make an effort to observe what is happening, using our imagination to try to innovate (not copy or imitate - whilst acceptable that is only a consequence of the observation) and exchange information with colleagues and clients so that we can also apply their experience to improve the quality of our yacht harbours.

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