

Trade fairs can thrive during the pandemic: a review of the Genoa International Boat Show.

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During the pandemic, organizing trade fairs and public exhibitions has been, to say the least, challenging. The **61st Genoa International Boat Show** proved to everyone that not only it could be done, but also it could be a resounding success.

The world's number one showcase of the very best that Italy's shipbuilding can offer opened last week in Genoa, looking to improve on last year's event. On 16 September, during the inauguration ceremony, government officials, local authorities, and organizers expressed the utmost confidence in the success of the event, describing it as a symbol of Italy's ability to overcome difficulties, praising its potential to attract foreign businesses and jumpstart a comprehensive economic recovery.

In the words of Enrico Giovannini, Minister for Sustainable Infrastructure and Mobility, "to support this industry means to create opportunities for women and younger generations. Innovation and training are the best ingredients to ensure economic growth across the country. Both must therefore be supported, including with the National Recovery Plan and investment".

Boating exports even grew during 2020, recording a 17% growth, decisively outpacing the overall national trend. In 2021, the estimated global revenue of the Italian boating industry grew by almost a quarter (+23.8%), reaching a total value of approximately six billion euros. According to the data collected as of 31 August 2021 by the Italian Marine Industry Association Market Analysis Department, such figures cannot be credited just to a post-lockdown rebound. They denote the health of the industry as a whole going up and down the entirety of the supply chain. In 2020, the sector held steady - employment in it even grew - performing better than the national economy average, anticipating in some way the overall recovery.

Over five days, the Boat Show celebrated innovation with its Design Innovation Award, a prize reserved for products standing out for their conceptual, technical, and formal quality. Thanks to a partnership with the Italian Trade Agency, ten startups took part in the Italian StartUp initiative focused on sustainability and eco-friendly mobility. Sustainability and tourism were the focus on day three, highlighting the interconnectedness of the boating industry to a still-recovering touristic sector and to the sea, intended as a resource to be treasured and preserved.

Regattas, panels, conferences took place over the following days leading up to 20 September, when the focus shifted on the opportunities for the marine industry. The panels *Liguria, Capital of the Blue Economy* and *Liguria: A Boating Hub* stressed the relevance of the Blue economy for the region and presented current ongoing projects across the region aimed at enhancing and integrating opportunities and resources tied to the sea and the boating industry. *Financial paths at sea, the PNRR opportunities*, the conference organised by ASSILEA (The Italian Leasing

Association), examined just how much the leasing sector, marinas, and green machinery producers can carry forward the National Recovery Plan's provisions together, given a cooperative approach to development.

The agenda also included a conference organised by ASSONAT as part of the sixth National Marine Economy Day. In it, the Frosinone and Latina Chamber of Commerce presented their ninth National Marine Economy Report promoted by "Informare" and processed by the G. Tagliacarne Research Centre and Unioncamere, a highly anticipated event for the entire industry. The presentation was followed by a Workshop dedicated to Blue Growth, promoted by Assonautica, Informare and Assonat, where the "sea system" took centre stage as a resource and driving force for growth, employment and innovation, underlining the multiplying effect of the marine economy. Almost 95,000 visitors attended the Boat Show, a 30% increase over the last edition. The Show was essentially sold out, considering that anti-Covid measures limited total attendance to 98,000. Contracts signed also increased (12%) compared to 2020. The event was also live-streamed online for almost 128 hours with 2,217,119 impressions; the site logged 260,000 unique users between 1 and 19 September, and over 1,250,751 people reached through the official social media platforms.

Offering his closing remarks, the Mayor of Genoa Marco Bucci, stated: "The Genoa International Boat Show has been an enormous success, a success that is well represented in the numbers recorded and the great sense of satisfaction I have perceived personally from among those working in the industry. Another reason why this event has been such a success is how well the new Levante Waterfront project has been received, a project aimed to be of service to the entire city and to many other activities to come. An encouraging sign for the future, Genoa wants to be as welcoming as it can, the city is investing as much in the Boat Show as it is in the boating industry as a whole, in the areas close to the sea, our real strong points: the sea has a tremendous impact on our economy, our workers and our culture."

Source: Genoa Boat Show