CLAIMS

1. A ship defining a longitudinal direction and a transverse direction and comprising a freeboard, an upper deck, and at least one sheltered deck below the upper deck, where the freeboard is defined as an outer surface between a waterline and the upper deck and extending circumferentially about the ship, the ship comprising at least one hatch structure comprising:

- a first opening in the freeboard providing access to one of the at least one sheltered decks,

- a second hatch element slidable between at least one open position providing vertical access to one of the at least one sheltered decks through a second opening in the upper deck and a closed position where the second hatch element covers the second opening,

wherein the second hatch element protrudes over the first opening in one of the at least one open positions.

2. The ship according to claim 1, comprising an open transition between the first opening and the second opening, the first opening and the second opening thereby forming one unitary opening.

3. The ship according to claim 1, wherein the second hatch element extends from a starboard side of the ship to a port side of the ship, and the second hatch element is movable to selectively protrude over the freeboard on a starboard or a port side of the ship to thereby define two open positions.

4. The ship according to claim 1, comprising a first lifting structure carried by the second hatch element and configured for lifting objects from one of the at least one sheltered decks such that the lifted objects are carried by the second hatch element.

5. The ship according to claim 2 and 4, wherein the first lifting structure is configured to move across the open transition between the first opening and the second opening, upon movement of the second hatch element between one of the at least one open positions and the closed position.

6. The ship according to claim 1, further comprising a first hatch element movable between an open position providing sideways access to one of the at least one sheltered decks

through the first opening and a closed position where the first hatch element covers the first opening.

7. The ship according to claim 6, wherein the first hatch element is configured to border on the second hatch element along a border between the first and the second opening.

8. The ship according to claim 6, wherein the first hatch element is joined to the second hatch element in the closed positions of the first hatch element and second hatch element.

9. The ship according to claim 6, wherein the first hatch element is movable in the longitudinal direction along the freeboard between at least one open position and a closed position.

10. The ship according to claim 6, wherein the first hatch element comprises a first element section and a second element section, the first and second element sections being separately movable relative to each other and relative to the first opening.

11. The ship according to claim 1, comprising a utility module insertable into and removable from one of the sheltered decks through the first opening.

12. The ship according to claim 1, wherein the second hatch element is movable in the transverse direction, and the first opening is in a port side or a starboard side of the freeboard.

13. The ship according to claim 1, wherein the second hatch element is movable in the longitudinal direction, and the first opening is in a bow part or stern part of the freeboard.

14. A method of loading or unloading cargo from one of the at least one sheltered decks of a ship according to any of the preceding claims, the method comprising moving the second hatch structure to the open position and loading the cargo into the sheltered deck via at least one of the first and the second openings.

15. The method according to claim 14, wherein the ship is moored to a quay at one of its starboard or port sides and the second hatch structure is moved to the open position towards the other one of the ships starboard or port sides.

16. The method according to claim 15, wherein an open transition between the first opening and the second opening is utilised as improved access for loading cargo into or out of the sheltered deck.

17. The method according to claim 14 wherein the ship comprises a utility module insertable into and removable from one of the sheltered decks through the first opening, the method comprising:

-moving the first hatch structure to an open position to open the first opening;

- using the first lifting structure attached to the second hatch structure to move the utility module relative to one of the at least one sheltered decks.

18. The method according to claim 17, wherein the hatch structure comprises a third opening in the freeboard providing access to one of the at least one sheltered decks, and wherein the utility module is moved from one location on one of the at least one sheltered decks to a location outside the ship via the first or third opening.

19. A method of utilising a utility module on a ship according to claim 1, wherein the utility module is loaded into the sheltered deck via the first opening and has an operational state requiring access from the sheltered deck to an ambient space outside the sheltered deck, wherein the access to the ambient space is established through the second opening.

20. A method of utilising a utility module on a ship according to claim 1, wherein the utility module is loaded into the sheltered deck via the second opening and has an operational state requiring access from the sheltered deck to an ambient space, wherein the access to the ambient space outside the sheltered deck is established through the first opening.