



# New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences



Volume 4, Issue 3 (2017) 46-54

ISSN 2421-8030

[www.prosoc.eu](http://www.prosoc.eu)

Selected papers of 7th World Conference on Learning, Teaching and Educational Leadership, (WCLTA 2016) 27-29 October 2016, Danubius Hotel Flamenco Convention Center, Budapest, Hungary

## Choice of maritime career – following footsteps or a conscious decision

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### Suggested Citation:

Skrzyszewska, K. (2017). Choice of maritime career – following footsteps or a conscious decision. *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences*. [Online]. 4(3), pp 46-54. Available from: [www.prosoc.eu](http://www.prosoc.eu)

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Jesús Garcia Laborda, University of Alcala, Spain

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### Abstract

Problem statement: Generation Y has reached a point where the majority of them have begun to make critical choices in regards to their careers. Preferences of this generation are incompatible with the current conditions that accompany work at sea. In the global seafarers labor market the number of officers from Europe steadily decreases. Nevertheless, Polish maritime universities (both public and private) receive hundreds of applications from candidates that are planning to become marine navigators or marine mechanics, even though the Polish merchant fleet consists of only a few dozen ships sailing under foreign flags. Purpose of study: Firstly - To investigate the factors that influence career choices of students from Polish maritime universities. Secondly - To illustrate the scope of the students' knowledge in regards to the reality of the maritime labor market, seafarers work, and their living conditions. Finally an assessment to decipher the real motivator behind their career choice and their own analysis of possible future work. Method: A survey containing questions from three areas was used: (i) factors influencing choice of study, (ii) knowledge of the maritime labor market, (iii) Personal background of survey participants. The questionnaires were filled out by the students of the Gdynia Maritime University: Faculty of Navigation (222 persons) and the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering (154 people). Findings and results: Most of the students declared that their choice of study was made independent of outside influence. However, it turned out that almost all of them have people who work at sea in their circle of family or friends. Students frequently got an idea of future job prospects by observing the careers of those around them (relatives or peers). The biggest motivator for this career path was high earnings while the biggest disadvantage was separation from loved ones.

Keywords: Generation Y, seafarers shortage, maritime policies, career choice.

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## 1. Generation Y and the Challenges of Working at Sea

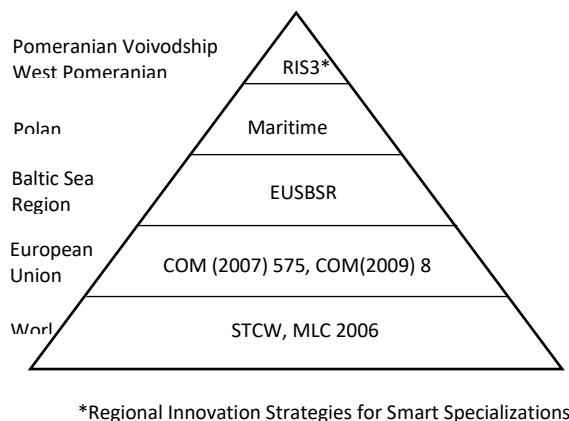
Occupations requiring the appointment, relating to the service of others are rarely chosen by people entering adulthood, making life choices. It is related to generational change when representatives of the Generation Y begin to appear in the labor market (Grobelna & Marciszewska, 2016).

Generation Y is optimistic and focused on its goals. It has a lot of expectations and wants to achieve professional success (Caesar & Cahoons, 2013). Growing up in the digitally connected world, it uses the Internet as a tool for learning, building the relationships, socializing and work. In the case of maritime labor conditions change in the functioning of all the listed areas. No access to the Internet, a limited number of people around, limited space, lack of opportunities to interact with people outside of the ship reflects negatively on the perception of the maritime labor for young people. Generation Y is a generation in constant contact and that is possible by the mobile phone technology and Internet availability. By using a variety of tools and applications young people are in permanent communication, but only on land. At sea, this is still impossible. Communication, if any, available to the general staff, is limited to the exchange of e-mails, which does not give the opportunity to be in the middle of events, as is the case with platforms (e.g. Facebook) (Cahoon & Haugstetter, 2008).

An interest of the “sea” as a place to work decreases not only in rich countries - those with a strong maritime tradition. This also applies to countries in transition, where work on the sea used to be perceived as attractive. The situation changed - work at sea is no longer seen as an opportunity to leave the country. Also, wages are not attractive enough to compensate for the disadvantages of seamen work.

## 2. The Labor Market at Sea - Problems and the Attempts of Solving

Years long analysis of the market at sea, points to a deepening deficit of merchant officers, in particular management level officers (EC, 2011). With the increase in the degree of specialization of ships there is a need for an adequate number of people with expertise and practice allowing the operation of complex vessels. The problem of imbalance in the labor market at sea is noticeable not only in the forecasts for the development of the labor market, but also in the trade media. Many institutions and entities associated with shipping are involved in efforts to reduce the deficit of seamen. The activities have a various forms of action aimed at promoting the work at sea (e.g. organized by IMO action "Go to Sea!", by strategies, policy development to specific legal solutions, in which on one hand encourages, on the other hand requires the promotion and education, among others, human resources officers (Fig. 1) (IMO, 2006).



**Figure 1. Convention, strategies, policies - on education of seafarers, the promotion of maritime labor depending on the impact range**

The issue of promoting maritime labor that will encourage the choice of careers in maritime professions and popularize marine knowledge and career opportunities are raised in international conventions and strategic documents of varying range of influence.

The largest, the international scope is presented by the conventions of the STCW (*International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers*) and the MLC2006 (*Maritime Labor Convention*) (IMO, 1978; ILO 2006).

With regard to the STCW Convention and the promotion of employment at sea, emphasis on these issues has been raised at the Conference of the Parties to the STCW Convention in Manila in 2010. In addition to the changes and additions to the same Convention and Code, the participants of the conference also adopted several resolutions relating to promotion of maritime labor - as a response to the increasingly serious problems of imbalance in the labor market. Resolution 12 recommended that "(...) Administration, shipping companies, ship owner, ship manager and any other entities" would promote the work at the sea among young people and those already working were interested in active practice of the profession sailor. As ways to achieve the objective indicated: creating a positive image of the maritime sector, dissemination, especially among young people awareness of the opportunities posed by career-related work on ships, improving the conditions of life at sea, including access to the Internet, the active participation of the officers in the training of young staff on board, ensuring appropriate conditions of accommodation trainees, take measures to "instill pride in the maritime profession" and fostering the creation of a "safety culture and environmental conscience among all those who serve on their ships" (IMO, 2010). Resolution 18. and 19. also refer to the difficult working conditions of seafarers - recognize their role in economic and social development of the world and recommend the implementation and enforcement of laws guaranteeing seafarers' rights. STCW recommended the promotion of maritime labor countries - parties to the STCW Convention. The Conference of Manila joined the celebration of the Year of the Seafarer established by the IMO and set the date of the end of the Conference (June 25th), the International Day of the Seafarer (IMO, 2010).

Convention MLC2006 imposes on the State, Party to the Convention - the obligations for promoting the seafaring profession and engage in the training of seafarers. It does not use statements "should," "strongly recommended" etc. In regulation 2.8, standard A2.8 - "Career and skill development and employment opportunities for seafarers" is stated that: "1. Each Member shall have national policies that encourage career and skill development and employment opportunities for seafarers, in order to provide the maritime sector with a stable and competent workforce. 2. The aim of the policies referred to in paragraph 1. of this Standard shall be to help seafarers strengthen their competencies, qualifications and employment opportunities. 3. Each Member shall, after consulting the ship owners' and seafarers' organizations concerned, establish clear objectives for vocational guidance, education and training of seafarers whose duties on board ship primarily relate to the safe operation and navigation of the ship, including ongoing training" (ILO, 2006).

At EU level, the issues of employment at sea were raised in two documents: the *Integrated Maritime Policy* (COM 575, 2007) and *Strategic Goals and Recommendations for the EU's Maritime Transport Policy until 2018* (COM 8, 2009). Integrated Maritime Policy for the European Union covers five areas of interaction, including "maximizing the sustainable use of oceans and seas". European Commission as the key issues in sustainable development enumerates: the maritime transport, European ports, shipbuilding, repair and marine equipment, multi-sectoral clusters and jobs in the maritime sector (COM 575, 2007). One of the objectives of the European Commission is to create more and better jobs for Europeans in the maritime economy. Noting the negative phenomena in the labor market at sea, the Commission concluded that the improvement of working conditions (safety, comfort of life at sea, workers' rights as in the case of work on land) can help to reverse negative trends. Actions to improve working conditions at sea are to be undertaken jointly by all stakeholders using "(...) effective regulatory framework, which take into account the context of the global sector" (COM 575, 2007).

The Commission will support the creation of a system providing an attractive and wide range of opportunities to develop career paths in the maritime sector. Numerous examples of enhancing the

attractiveness of jobs in professions related to the maritime sector were placed in *Strategic goals and recommendations in the field of EU maritime transport policy until 2018* (COM 8, 2009). The task of the Commission, Member States and interested companies will be taking action to: (i) create opportunities of careers in the so-called maritime clusters in both EU merchant officers, who should have "opportunities to develop skills and qualifications at advanced level" and ship crews - career paths to become merchant officers, (ii) improve the perception of shipping and the maritime sector by the public, through promotional campaigns raising awareness about the opportunities of employment, and recruitment campaigns to improve the mobility of the maritime sector, (iii) they will support the efforts of the IMO and ILO taken to protect the rights of seafarers and their families in an emergency situation (sea accidents, abandonment: sailor, ship, injury, death sailor) and conditions of shore leave, (iv) verify social legislation "(...) in order to create more and better jobs in shipping the EU", (v) increase in ships access to broadband as well as information and communication technologies that will be used to improve the quality of life at sea (health, distance learning, personal communication), (vi) reduce excessive and time-consuming administrative duties of masters and senior officers (COM 8, 2009).

With regard to the two aspects - training of crews and working conditions, the Commission presented a specific goals, the implementation of which is supposed to ensure a safe and environmentally friendly shipping operations. In addition to the prior, documents it includes three new proposals: (1) to promote various forms of cooperation between the European maritime units of education, (2) to develop (in cooperation with training institutions and the sector of maritime) the program of Certificates of Excellence (*Maritime Certificate of Excellence*) for graduates of European maritime postgraduate studies. Obtaining of such a certificate would be a fulfillment of the requirements that go beyond the requirements of the STCW (3) to promote and, if necessary, "backed by a system of incentives" to take on the ships students of European maritime universities) on the cadets positions (COM 8, 2009).

The European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR 2014-2020) issues of training of seafarers have been included in the main goal "save the sea" as a specific objective: "clean and safe navigation". In the Strategy it is stated that in view of the increasing intensity of maritime transport within the Baltic Sea, sailing, which will be safe and friendly environment is becoming an increasingly important issue for the entire region - sea basin and land areas. Therefore, the EU Strategy for the BSR action concerning navigation cover all aspects, including among other things, strengthening human capital by providing appropriate training, That is aimed to establish common standards and to encourage the selection of maritime career (EUSBSR Action Plan, 2015).

At the national level, development of the system educating the needs of the maritime sector, is lifted in a single strategic document – *The Maritime Policy of the Republic of Poland until 2020 (with perspective until 2030)*. The chapter "Creating conditions for the development of the maritime economy based on knowledge and qualifications" in paragraph "Ensuring high standards of maritime education" it is stated: "our maritime education is one of the leading European and Polish system of maritime education is considered to be a model". "To become a leader in the training of seafarers" is expected result of the implementation of maritime policy in relation to the promotion and education (Międzyresortowy Zespół ..., 2015).

At the local level - NUTS2 (in a hierarchical system for dividing up the economic territory of the EU – NUTS2 in Poland are called voivodships), in accordance with the directions of the development of EU, regional smart specialization were established. In Poland, two regions have typical maritime character and almost the entire coastline lies within their administrative boundaries. These are the Pomeranian and West Pomeranian Voivodships. In both of them one of the region smart specializations (RIS) were specializations closely related to the exploitation of the sea. In Pomerania it is the "technology offshore and port and logistics" and in the West Pomeranian Voivodship - "maritime activities and logistics". In both cases, the development of specialization will take place as long as the proper human resources with competence required to conduct vessels are available (Inteligentne specjalizacje, 2015; Regionalne Specjalizacje, 2015).

The above summary of strategies and policies development, regardless of the scope of the area concerned, indicates the need to ensure an adequate number of sailors. Each of the documents raises questions of training and living conditions. Therefore, the question arises – in the light of so widely perceived lack of personnel officers, and at the same time growing demand for highly skilled officers, young people see an opportunity to develop their career at sea? Does Generation Y know enough about the specifics of the work and sees a chance to obtain a satisfying job that will meet their expectations? These questions were crucial to conduct a research among students of the Maritime University - students that would eventually become future merchant officers.

### 3. Work at Sea as an Element of Career Path, in the Light of the Survey Conducted at Gdynia Maritime University

To test and evaluate how the state - part of the MLC2006 convention implements the provisions - surveys of first-year students of Navigation and of Mechanical Engineering Faculties, at Gdynia Maritime University (GMU) were conducted. The results presented in this article are the first summary of the research which started in the academic year 2014/2015 at the Faculties educating future merchant officers - navigators and marine engineers. Up to this date, partial results were published (Skrzeszewska, 2015; Skrzyszewska, Milić Beran, 2016a; Skrzyszewska, Milić Beran, 2016b). The results presented in the following part have been obtained by examining a total of 376 students (a detailed description of the sample in Table 1).

**Table 1. The size of particular groups of respondents**

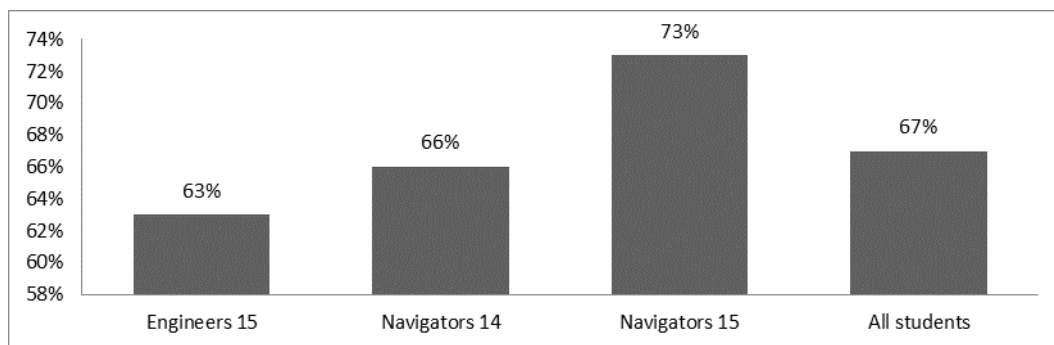
Faculty	Total		
Mechanical Engineering	Navigation		
	2014/2015	2015/2016	
	154	109	
		113	
			376

Several aspects related to the choice of study were examined: knowledge of the work, a degree of self-choosing of the maritime university, motivators of the selection of maritime studies, knowledge of the realities of the labor market at sea and the negative factors related to work at sea. The group of respondents consisted of selected first year students. The goal of a such selection was to investigate the real reasons for choosing the profession, and the perception of working at sea for young people. After a few semesters of study and after practices on the training ships and merchant ships - students will change their idea about work at sea. Some of this would be the result of acquired experience, and some a consequence of the opinion replicated and solidified of the seafarers themselves.

The decision has been made to examine the entire population of students of the Navigation and Mechanical Engineering Faculties at the Gdynia Maritime University. The purpose of the study was to verify the thesis that working at sea a decision primarily made by those who come from the sailors circles. Another thesis that the study verified was that the work of the seaman involves stereotypes such as: the sea on the one hand is a source of high earnings, and on the other hand exposes sailors to long term separation from close ones and loneliness.

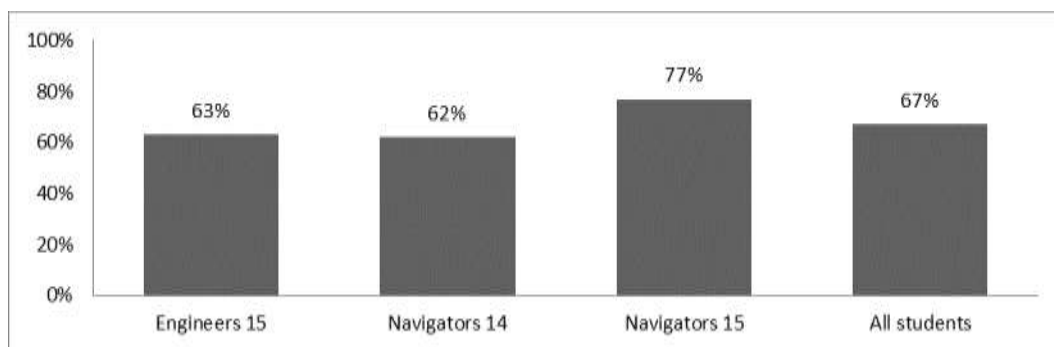
The purpose of the question concerning the knowledge of being at sea, was to indicate how often the choice of education preparing for work at sea was made by ones who in their environment

interact with individuals working at sea. It turned out that more than 2/3 of the participants have in their circles family members or friends who work at sea (Fig. 2).



**Figure 2. Percentage of students whose families or friends are the people working at sea**

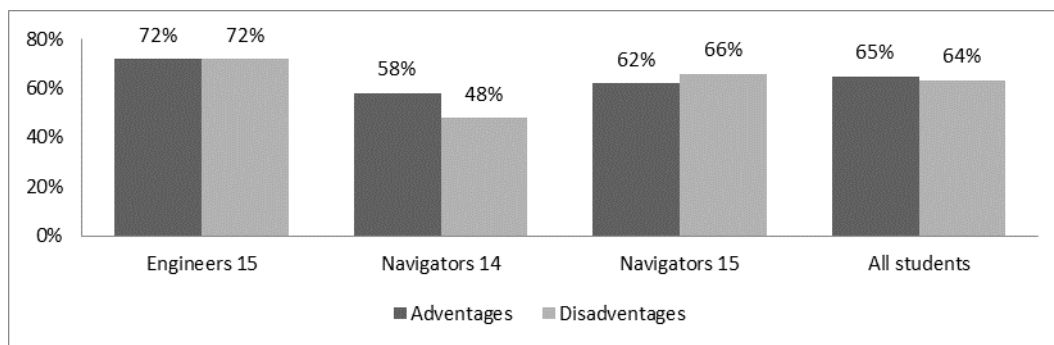
It seems that in a view of this fact, the choice of maritime university has been dictated by the environment of future students. It was assumed that the relationship with the sea is strong enough and work at sea is perceived so positively that the example of family and friends has an impact on the young people's decision. Results denied such reasoning. When questioned "Who had the greatest influence on the adoption by your studies at the GMU", 2/3 of the respondents replied that they made the decision on their own (Fig. 3).



**Figure 3. The percentage of students who claim that the choice of study was an independent decision**

The rate of Pearson's correlation calculated for above two issues is 0.93. This means a large convergence of all answers. Therefore, the author concludes that it cannot be excluded that some of the people who in their opinion, have decided independently choosing guided studies, considered the experience and opinions of people that work at sea. Even if they did not seem to be aware of it and did not receive direct guidance from those working at sea.

Issue of the benefits and costs of working at sea would help accomplish two goals: first to check what is the greatest value and the greatest burden of work at sea by those who intend to take the job. The most often benefit pointed out by respondents is certainty of working at sea. The biggest disadvantage in respondent's opinion is separation from loved ones (Fig. 4).

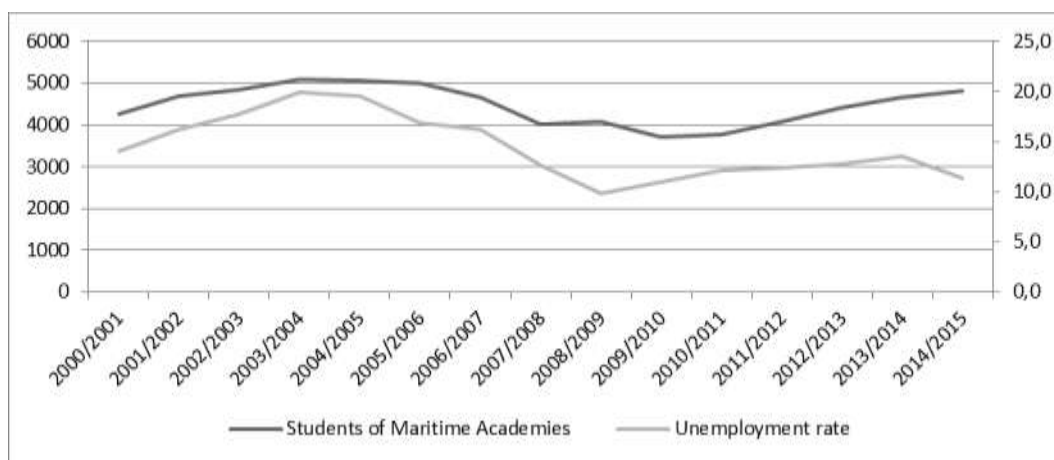


**Figure 4. The advantages and disadvantages of working at sea perceived by the students of Gdynia Maritime University**

The results obtained with regards to the advantages and disadvantages at sea are surprising. In this population the percentage of indications for the biggest advantage / disadvantage is almost the same. In the group of navigators, who began their studies in the academic year of 2015/2016 – it is indicated that the negative sides of maritime labor outweigh the positive ones. In light of that the question comes - why do some of the students chose this course of education when they believe that the cost of an alternative choice outweigh the benefits of their choice? Was the choice of study not an independent process, but an attempt to imitate? Repeated career path, which, has a positive aspect for person making decision of future career, even though the negative sides seem stronger and more important?

The next step of the study was to determine which aspects of the future work influenced the choice of studies in the greatest degree. By far the most important factor in study selection was assurance of work and no problems with finding it. The second important factor in the choice of studies and careers at sea is associated with high wages. Another, ranked the most beneficial was the chance to explore the world.

While issues related to wages - their height, the ability to travel are closely correlated with subjective assessment of each of the respondents, the data of Polish institutions statistics (Central Statistical Office) proved that certainty of getting work after graduating from that type of university is important (Fig. 5).



**Figure 5. Number of students of the Academy Maritime (left axis) in Poland and the average unemployment rate (right axis)**

Data from the last 15 years indicates that the direction of change in the number of students of Polish maritime academy is consistent with the direction of changes in the amount of average annual unemployment rates (Pearson's correlation coefficient is 0.8). It can be concluded that with the development of the economy, decreasing unemployment, the number of people willing to undertake studies on offshore fields will decline.

#### 4. Conclusions

Work at sea is regarded as an alternative to working on the land in a situation where the labor market is unfavourable to new entrants, and the unemployment rate rises. Given the slow, but still the growth of standard of living in Poland, reflecting the level of European standards - Poles, like other nations of Western Europe will choose to work in their country. The work is safer, equally attractive in terms of salaries and less demanding. The work, which will not terminate them, even for a short time, from active family and social life (even if it is limited to the use of application platforms and social networking).

The students pointed out that the fear of problems with finding a job in their country was the main reason to study the sea. This claim has also been confirmed summary by the number of Maritime Universities' students with an average unemployment rate and tight correlation between these values. It is disturbing that although bodies of varying levels (from international to local) are calling for the promotion of maritime labour status, they are not successful in the effective promotion of maritime professions. Also the same academies do not suggest possible paths of career development, which may be only the beginning of short-term work at sea. Students writing about the benefits this profession use stereotypes like; high wages or the chance to explore the world. They do not refer to issues that are characteristic for their generation.

Maritime academies do not encourage young people whose preferences and expectations differ from a generation for whom the academies were created (Baby Boom Generation). No change in the approach to the promotion and assistance in designing a career that can involve less time spent at sea, may lead to a deficit of candidates willing to undertake maritime studies. Even though different bodies have taken a great amount of the initiatives to increase the supply of merchant officers.

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