

Postmodern Openings

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Gender in Postmodernism Maritime Transport

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Abstract: In this article the focus of the scientific analysis is made on the possible relation between postmodernism and maritime gender culture. The fundament of the study are the research findings from the international project “Gender Equality and Cultural Awareness in Maritime Education and Training” (GECAMET), financed by the International Association of Maritime Universities and the Nippon Foundation between 2017 and 2018. GECAMET had the objective of advancing knowledge in the domain of women motivation to join the maritime sector and on cultural awareness in mixed crews.

In this paper is used an innovative approach on the relation between postmodernism challenges and the complexity of the intercultural relations established among individuals (human factors), shipping companies, ship management practices and MET institutions on issues related to gender equality.

Keywords: *Gender shipping; seafarer; gender stereotypes; gender bias; Maritime Labour Convention; International Labour Organization.*

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1. Introduction

In general, postmodernism theories and concepts refer to “soft” aspects related to art, culture, philosophy, literature, architecture, semiotics and ethics. In rare cases, postmodernism is associated to “hard” technical concepts. The study presented in this paper indicate there is a lack of research connecting postmodernism to technical sectors like transport, and in particular maritime transport. Also there is a lack of published studies connecting postmodernism framework to people mobility and infrastructures. Yet, the connection is obvious. Firstly, maritime transport is a sector where are manifested a raising trend of awareness actions on the role of ethical and culture policies implemented at the organizational level of maritime businesses (companies of navigation, crewing business, ship management or other entrepreneurial systems connected to commercial affairs in sea transport). Secondly, mobility (transport) of persons involves mobility of cultures. Thirdly, postmodernism met in architecture is reflected in the visual urbanism, e.g. port cities infrastructures. Not ultimately, postmodernism influences the entrepreneurial culture.

2. Literature review

While there is recorded a consistent literature on the independent concepts of postmodernism, respectively on gender and maritime transport, published literature on the mix of such concepts is scarce. A common research approach on postmodernism and maritime transport seems to be elliptical.

So far, M. Roe (2012) had the most complex approach on maritime postmodernism in practice, with a recent focus on postmodernism and organizations, transport and shipping, including labour, green shipping and postmodern maritime governance.

Kamphuis (2006) describes the limitation of coastal engineering models in relation with postmodernism.

The emergence of postmodernism on the urban waterfront and geographical perspectives on changing relationships were analyzed by Norcliffe, Bassett, and Hoare (1996). They have made a scientific approach on the relationship on postmodernism and city-ports and they have identified three specific cityport themes. Postmodernism, which is not a unified system of beliefs, has been presented and interpreted in a diversity of ways by Cova, Prévot, and Spencer (2012). While not discussing explicitly on postmodernism, de Vivero (2007) analyses the European maritime policy expressed through the EU Green Paper, from the perspective of the

European vision including the presence of social, cultural and historical elements.

Research on postmodernism has been made systematically. D. Harvey (1989) has analyzed the transition from modernity to postmodernity in contemporary culture and the political-economic transformation of late twentieth-century capitalism. In his opinion, “Capitalism did not invent *'the other'* (distinct disadvantaged groups, e.g.: women, blacks, colonized peoples, minorities) but it certainly made use of and promoted it in highly structured ways” (Harvey, 1989: 104). He has considered “the treatment of difference and 'otherness' not as something to be added on to more fundamental Marxist categories (like class and productive forces), but as something that should be omni-present from the very beginning in any attempt to grasp the dialectics of social change. The importance of recuperating such aspects of social organization as race, gender, religion, within the overall frame of historical materialist enquiry (with its emphasis upon the power of money and capital circulation) and class politics (with its emphasis upon the unity of the emancipatory struggle) cannot be overestimated (Harvey, 1989: 355). Postmodernism has been “important in acknowledging 'the multiple forms of otherness as they emerge from differences in subjectivity, gender and sexuality, race and class, temporal (configurations of sensibility) and spatial geographic locations and dislocations'” (Huysens, 1984: 50). Soja (1989), an author cited for more than 9500 times, has approached the postmodern geographies and the critical social theory,

Previous research on the subject of maritime multiculturalism and multicultural crew is more abundant. Several authors indicate that the human issues that arise due to multicultural orientations are the relation between multinational crew and the occurrence of accidents (Berg, Storgård, & Lappalainen, 2013; Hansen, Laursen, Frydberg, & Kristensen, 2008), the challenges with cross-cultural communication (Horck, 2010; Iakovaki & Theotokas, 2010; MARCOM, 1999; Moreby, 1990; Sampson & Zhao, 2003) and the challenges that arise from living conditions onboard (Acejo, 2012, Alderton et al., 2004; Kahveci, Lane, & Sampson, 2002). Also there is a challenge with the working relations among culturally diverse teams (Wu, 2004; Knudsen, 2004; Progoulaki, 2003; Hansen et al., 2008).

In addition, Progoulaki (2003, 2008, 2010, 2011) has researched applied Human Resource Management practices in shipping.

Progoulaki and Theotokas (2016) analysed the issue of multicultural crews and the relevant theories that supports the “development of a framework of strategic choices that a shipping company can select for the

competitive management of its maritime human resources' cultural diversity".

3. Postmodernism maritime transport

Based on technological advances, in the next ten years, the world merchant fleet is expected to grow, together with the demand for seafarers. According to 2015 BIMCO and ICS Manpower Report, the global demand for seafarers in 2015 is estimated at 1,545,000 seafarers, with the industry requiring approximately 790,500 officers and 754,500 ratings. In such conditions, MET institutions have an important role in providing officers, as the current supply-demand situation reveals a shortage of 16,500 officers. There is an anticipated trend of an overall shortage in the supply of officers occurs despite improved recruitment and training levels and reductions in officer wastage rates over the past five years. As the shipping industry continues to grow, sustainability will be dependent on more women entering the maritime professions.

Continuing the trend from the past decade, the global demand for seafaring is increasing due to the growing world fleet, yet attractiveness of seafaring careers is affected by the on shore employment possibilities. In such circumstances, seafarer women would be a suitable solution for the global demand of seafaring but it is still rare to find female working on board ships. It is estimated that only 2% of the world maritime workforce are women. Several issues and concerns have emerged for the low numbers of women working on board ships. The most serious issues relate to the discrimination and harassment situation facing women seafarers. Regarding the discrimination, women usually do not have the equal rights for maritime education and training institutes in terms of nautical courses. Even women graduate from nautical courses successfully; they may still suffer from the bias from shipping companies who are reluctant to employ women seafarers. Once women are employed to work on board, they still face the unequal treatment, such as lower payment and limited accesses to facilities and equipment, comparing with male seafarers. For the bullying or harassment issues, they may particularly happen seriously and frequently at sea as seafarers are far away from their family, friends and other sources of support. Women seafarers are facing tougher situation on sea in terms of harassment, such as sexual harassment or even abuse while at sea. Some special concerns for women seafarers, such as maternity rights, have been drawn much attention recently.

In the “Gender Equality and Cultural Awareness in Maritime Education and Training” (GECAMET) research, ten researchers from maritime education and training institutions of Australia, Canada, Ghana, Norway, Philippines, Romania, South Korea, Spain, and Vietnam have proposed concrete measures of good practice for reducing gender bias in the shipping sector. The research team has used their diverse and complementary experience in assessment of shipping companies, professional expertise regarding multicultural (mixed) business work environment in both onshore and offshore business, experience in intercultural coaching, training and consultancy, organizational anthropology, a study of the cultural differences and scientific expertise on performance and multicultural vessels.

The overall research objectives in GECAMET were to improve the understanding of human factors in the maritime sector considering gender equality and cultural awareness issues; to evaluate the economic efficiency of shipping companies with mixed crews; to assess the effects of external requirements on ship management policies regarding modern human resource management, gender equality and cultural awareness and to assess holistically the role of maritime education and training in the complex relation human factors- shipping business environment – ship management policies. GECAMET research made so far indicate large discrepancies in the situation of female seafarer around the world. In some countries, access of women to maritime education is still mostly restricted, but is important to mention there were made some efforts and is expectation to improve this situation in the nearest time (e.g. Saudi Arabia and partly Vietnam). In other countries, access to maritime education is partly permitted, but sponsorship, cadetship, training programs on board ship and employment are mostly denied to females, probably due to stereotyping of the shipping companies (e.g. China, Taiwan, Korea and Japan). And in most other countries, female can successfully pursue both seafaring education and careers (e.g. Australia, India, Philippines, Ghana, Canada, US and all the European countries having MET institutions).

Good cases of employment women in seafaring are benchmarking shipping. This is either through the involvement of deserving shipping companies (e.g. Maersk), either through solid partnerships between MET institutions and private shipping companies (e.g. training partnership program between the Royal Caribbean Cruise and the Regional Maritime University from Ghana) or through examples of good governmental initiative. In such context is worth mentioning the case of Iceland, France and Germany that have recently proposed in 2018 and implemented some

initiatives of encouraging gender equality on a 50% ratio in any employment in all sectors. Also a very good benchmark example of international institutional commitment to gender equality is the fact that all institutions and agencies of the United Nations make annual reports available for public with their employment gender ratio and their commitment to reach a 50% gender equality ratio in employment until 2030.

4. Gender issues in the postmodernism maritime industry

GECAMET results indicate that male-centred workplace culture and stereotypes influences women's choice to join or leave the shipping sector. The number of women in maritime professions is increasing, yet shipping remains a male-dominated industry. Seafarers are affected by several labour issues and one of such issues is included under the large umbrella of gender stereotypes. Maritime companies would probably need to start social responsible campaigns first with their own employees, by removing gender barriers at women seafarer employment and glass ceiling barriers after employment of female.

Also, GECAMET research indicates that several issues and concerns have emerged for the low numbers of women working on board ships. The most serious issues relate to the discrimination and harassment situation facing women seafarers. Regarding the discrimination, women usually do not have the equal rights for maritime education and training institutes in terms of nautical courses. Even women graduating from nautical courses successfully may still suffer from the bias from shipping companies who are reluctant to employ women seafarers. Once women are employed to work on board, they still face the unequal treatment, such as lower payment and limited accesses to facilities and equipment, comparing with male seafarers. For the bullying or harassment issues, they may particularly happen seriously and frequently at sea as seafarers are far away from their family, friends and other sources of support. Women seafarers are facing tougher situation on sea in terms of harassment, such as sexual harassment or even abuse while at sea. Some special concerns for women seafarers, such as maternity rights, have been drawn much attention recently within Maritime Labour Convention, the legal instrument issued by the International Labour Organisation.

The statistics regarding women seafarers needs to be updated, but overall, there are no expectations in consistent improvement of the situation. A result of the GECAMET study suggest that, in the opinion of the shipping companies representatives, the main reason for not employing

seafarer women is that female seafarers can get involved in sexual affairs with crew members and this affects the climate on board. A future research should be made in order to analyse if the above conclusion is a gender stereotype or a fact.

5. Solutions proposed and discussion

As a solution for women seafarers awareness and empowerment, the GECAMET team has proposed and analyzed the concept of “Gender shipping” within the context of the research, This concept is perceived as a new emerging trend of benchmark in the maritime sector, based on visible good examples of social responsible attitude on solving the gender issues within the industry. Maritime companies showing commitment to gender equality in shipping are benchmarking. The concept of gendering shipping defines companies who communicate actively the voluntary implementation of gender policies in their organizational culture. The implementation of gender policies occurs before regulations on the topic might shift the voluntary approach in one more or less recommended or mandatory approach. Gender shipping represents a supportive response of the seafaring industry, long expected, to the empowering necessities of female seafarers’ communities from the world shipping sector.

The problem of gender equality in the maritime field represents a challenge for obtaining human progress, economic development, respect, multiculturalism awareness and recognition of human rights. In a specific area like the maritime one, gender issues are often considered taboo subjects.

By sharing different multicultural perspective and ambitious goals, GECAMET research approached subjects that have never been researched before within IAMU research projects: female seafarers, gender equality and cultural awareness in maritime education and training. The methods to deliver such research are various and are comprised in online questionnaires and e-mail interviews to several target groups, visits, observations and discussions with diverse maritime stakeholders.

Another solution is the update of legal instruments and policies, as the Maritime Labor Convention, issued by the International Labor Organization, with gender requirements needed urgently by women seafarers. So far, related to gender, the Convention contains only limited paragraphs dedicated for establishing minimum working conditions for female seafarers. The initiative of updating MLC with requirements of gender policies, if (when) considered, will really make a difference in the

shipping sector and will improve very much the condition of seafarer women. There is no research in this domain so far.

Also, are needed effective intergovernmental strategies on recruitment and retention of seafarers and on the promotion of opportunities for women seafarers.

Maritime companies showing commitment to gender equality in shipping are simply benchmarked. Gendering shipping is a new emerging trend of benchmark in the maritime sector, based on obvious good examples of responsible social attitude on solving the gender issues within the industry. The concept of gendering shipping defines companies who communicate the voluntary implementation of gender policies in their organizational culture actively. The application of gender policies occurs before regulations on the topic might shift the voluntary approach in one more or less recommended or mandatory approach. Gendering shipping represents a supportive response of the maritime industry, long expected, to the empowering necessities of female seafarers' communities from the world shipping sector.

6. Conclusions

Tremendous efforts were made to gain awareness on the postmodernism key role of female seafarers in a sector affected by past modern challenges and traditionally ruled by gender bias and gender stereotypes. Positive results became more visible with each inspiring female seafarer leader encouraged by their employing companies to become role models for the next and actual generations of women seafarers. In such context we have proposed the term “gendering shipping” to reflect the new emerging trend of benchmarking in the transports sector. Gendering shipping is the contemporary trend of benchmarking maritime companies that assign a social responsible attitude in building a gender equal organizational culture both on board ships and inside the shipping company on shore. The trend represents a supportive response of the seafaring industry, long expected, to the empowering necessities of female seafarers' communities from the world shipping sector.

In order to face the competitive environment in the postmodern maritime industry, shipping companies should update their Human Resources policies by making them gender-friendly and by ensuring policies on gender equality and cultural awareness on board their ships and at the on-shore headquarters of the company. The appropriateness of a gender policy can be measured through the metrics of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs),

a tool used in performance measurement and holistic performance evaluation for important strategic decisions.

According to the GECAMET study, the main reason of postmodern shipping companies for not employing seafarer women is that female seafarers can get involved in sexual affairs with crew members and this affects the climate on board. A future research should be made in order to analyse if the above conclusion is a gender stereotype or a fact.

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