

YOUNGSTERS' MOTIVATIONS AND DIFFICULTIES FOR CHOOSING SEAFARER CAREER. THE CASE OF LATVIA

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The contribution of maritime academies is of first importance to the shipping industry. In order to respond to the growing demand for qualified seafarers in the European maritime community, the quality of recruitment campaigns should be enhanced, taking in consideration prospective students' beliefs and fears about the profession. Based on career motivation theory and on the concept of "generation", the aim of this study was to investigate youngsters' reasons for choosing or rejecting seafarer profession, and to investigate regional and gender differences.

In order to answer the research question, a sequential mixed-method study, using open-questions and a questionnaire, was conducted at the Novikontas Maritime College, in Riga, among participants of the concourse "Enkurs" from February to May 2014. 219 answers to the questionnaires and 144 to the open questions were recorded. After the analysis of scientific literature, the following research tasks were implemented: first, the questionnaire and open questions were elaborated and piloted; then data collection and preparatory data cleaning was done; after that, data were processed and analysed; the data analysis methods were Cronbach's alpha, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, Mean of ranks (MR) and Median, Chi², Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, Cross tabulation and t-test. Finally, the interpretation of the results and elaboration of conclusions and recommendation was done.

The main "reasons for choosing seafarer profession" were "stable employment" (MR=4.42 in a 5 point Likert scale) and "travelling and seeing new places" (MR=4.42), followed by "good salary" (MR=4.38). The main "dissuading factors" were "difficulties for family life" (MR=3.94) and "studies are too expensive" (MR=3.17). Statistically significant differences between regions and between genders were found: respondents from Latgale and Vidzeme were more attracted by seafarers' team spirit than respondents from other regions. For respondents from Riga, the lack of family life is not such a severe obstacle compared with other regions. Females seem to be more attracted by travelling and more concerned about bad influence of seafarer work on health than males, while males are more attracted by the salary and prestige of the profession than females.

In the last section these findings were compared with recent research and contrasted with the opinion of professional seafarers and real data about these issues, especially about family life, cost of the studies and health problem, for correcting what was wrong and confirming what was right in respondents' perceptions. Some recommendations for adapting career promotion campaigns to the needs of potential students are put forward. The results of this study will help Maritime Education and Training (MET) teachers to adapt their discourse to the needs of students. Also prospective maritime education students will find useful to reflect on the positive aspects and dissuading factors of this profession and to have a real picture of work at sea, in order to make a well informed choice of profession.

Keywords: *seafarer, career choice, career barriers, career motivations, Latvia.*

Introduction

Shipping is a high productivity industry. The marine and maritime economic sectors forming the EU's 'blue economy' represent roughly 5.6 million jobs and account for a Gross Value Added (GVA) of €495 billion (ECORYS, 2012). Each worker is estimated to have generated €88,000 of GDP, significantly above the EU average of €53,000. The contribution of maritime academies is of first importance to the field: the skills and experience of seafarers are vital to the smooth functioning of the shipping industry. It is essential that seafarers are properly trained and have a thorough understanding of the intricacies and complexities of working in a maritime setting. This is important in terms of safety, efficiency and ensuring the maritime environment is protected. Ultimately, it is the professionalism of seafarers

that ensures the smooth running of the shipping industry and, in turn, global maritime trade.

Indicative estimates suggest there were approximately 38,000 students/cadets in maritime academy – type training in 2012, an 11 per cent increase from 2004 (Oxford economics, 2014). In spite of these figures, as per latest statistic from World Maritime administrations, the average age of acting seafarers is growing. Professionals are getting older and the number of new graduates is not compensating this tendency steadily. Moreover, crew shipping companies have difficulties for recruiting shipping officers with university level. The latest Baltic and International Maritime Council (BIMCO) and the International Shipping Federation (ISF) report suggests that the current shortage of officers corresponds to 12% of the total

workforce (46,000 officers) by the year 2010 (IER, 2000). As stated in a recent document mapping maritime career path (Dearsley, 2013:4),

The European maritime community faces a major challenge in training sufficient numbers of young people to adequately supply the current and future needs of European Union Member States commercial trading fleets. There is also a huge, and growing, demand for European trained and qualified seafarers, both officers and ratings, to work in the numerous and varied industrial sectors that to some extent rely on a steady stream of seafarers qualified in accordance with the IMO Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping Convention (STCW)

Recruitment campaigns are one of the main actions to implement for solving this situation. A recent study concluded that “maritime education and training institutions have to explain young people all merits of maritime profession and show possibility for them to find emotional attractiveness and realization of their interests if they choose maritime professions” (Berzins & Barbare, 2013:17). In the last years there are some career promotion campaigns at international and national levels, with good results. At the level of the international institutions, the “Go to Sea!” campaign was launched in November 2008 by the International Maritime Organization (Mason, 2008) in association with the International Labour Organization (ILO), the “Round Table” of shipping NGOs – BIMCO, ICS/ISF, INTERCARGO and INTERTANKO – and the International Transport Workers Federation. The aim of this campaign was to promote seafaring as an attractive option for young people. The campaign focussed on the rewarding, stimulating and long-term prospects of seafarer career, not only at sea but also in the broader maritime industry. Collaterally, the “Go to sea!” initiative opened an umbrella under which industry and Governments could organize their own recruitment campaigns.

At national level, in Denmark a “World Careers” publicity campaign was launched by the Danish Ship-owners’ Association in 2008. The number of students entering programmes increased noticeably in 2009 and 2010. In Norway also, in 2007, the Norwegian Maritime Forum launched a recruitment campaign to highlight maritime sector opportunities to young people. Since then, the total number of students has increased by 42% to reach 1,500 in 2013. In Latvia some efforts were done during the last years. Since 2007, the Latvian Maritime Administration conducts the competition “Enkurs” to familiarize secondary school students with seafarers’ profession. Latvian Maritime Academy is also trying to attract high school students to the maritime sector, participating as one of 10 partners on the European Commission project “Youth4JOB”, aimed at promoting the first transition for young people from education to the labour market.

The impact of the career promotion campaigns depends on their quality and pertinence. And for improving quality, it seems useful to find out what is preventing those youngsters who are already interested in maritime profession from making a first step to enter maritime industry. It is possible that those youngsters who are interested in seafarer professions are influenced by their friends and relatives

with misrepresented information and several myths. Myths regarding sea profession, as for example, the long duration of the seafarers’ contract (more than 6 months), the supposed impossibility for seafarers to have a normal family life or the danger tied to seafarer profession due to lack of safety and security onboard, etc., came from a deep past, but they are still very strong in society. However, time is moving forward. Nowadays seafarers’ work is safer, and the stability and remuneration of the profession has considerably improved. Improvements have been done at institutional level: IMO and ILO recently upgraded existing legislations connected with seafarers, among them Maritime Labour convention (MLC) that entered into force in 2013 and the STCW manila amendments that entered into force in 2012.

Regarding the number of professional seafarers, Latvia holds the 5th place in Europe with more than 13 thousand seamen, two Maritime Colleges and the Latvian Maritime Academy with over 500 students. The pool of the Latvian seafarers is stable for the last 4–5 years but the number of graduates from maritime institutions is declining (Gailitis, 2013). Latvian Seafarers are well known among first class ship-owners and have stable and well paid positions on board of their vessels and ashore in their offices. In order to keep the number of seafarers at least on the same level it is necessary to increase numbers of students in maritime educational institutions. In a recent study (Berzins & Barbare, 2013), it was found that in Latvia like in other European highly industrialized countries, youngsters (16–18 y.o.) today found less attractive working on board and a little proportion of them is still interested in the seafaring profession.

It is essential to investigate what is attracting and what is frightening the young generation in seafarer profession in Latvia. Recently several surveys were conducted in Latvia on youngsters’ opinions about seafarer profession by the Latvian Maritime Administration and the Latvian Maritime Academy (Berzins & Barbare, 2013). In Lithuania, recent research has been conducted about the relationship between motives of choosing maritime professions and students’ approaches to learning (Kalvaitiene, Bartusevičiene & Sencila, 2011). These researches addressed a large public, including any secondary education students (with and without interest in the seafarer profession) as well as higher education students already involved in maritime education. For enhancing the quality of career promotion campaigns, it seemed important to the authors of this study to focus exclusively on high-school students who were already familiar with maritime profession, in order to solve more accurately their doubts and correct their false perceptions, therefore facilitating their choice of this profession.

The aim of this research was to grasp the beliefs about seafarer profession of high-school students who are familiar with maritime profession in Latvia. The research question is twofold: 1) youngsters’ reasons for choosing seafarer profession; and 2) factors that could dissuade them from becoming a seafarer. Some additional questions regarding youngsters’ interest in and information about seafarer profession, as well as regional and gender differences, were also addressed. In order to answer the research question, a sequential mixed-method study, using open-questions and a questionnaire, was conducted at the Novikontas Maritime College, in Riga, among participants of the concourse

“Enkurs” from February to May 2014. 219 answers to the questionnaires and 144 to the open questions were recorded.

After the analysis of scientific literature on career motivation theory and on the concept of “generation”, the following research tasks were implemented: First the questionnaire and open questions were elaborated and piloted. Then we made the data collection and preparatory data cleaning. After that data were processed and analysed. The data analysis methods were Cronbach’s alpha for reliability analysis, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for analysing the level of data, Mean of ranks and Median for statistical analysis, Chi² for statistical significance analysis, Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient, and Cross tabulation and t-test for comparison of groups. Finally, the interpretation of the results and elaboration of conclusions and recommendation was done.

This research will be useful for offering to youngsters a real picture of work at sea. It will help to improve the contents of the information delivered to prospective seafarer students in career promotion campaigns. Identifying present fears and myths about seafarer profession will help to improve the quality of information about seafarer career that is delivered to them by several channels (presentation in the schools, information in websites, forums about carrier choice etc.). The research will be useful also for pedagogical staff from maritime education: a better knowledge of students’ fears and expectations will help teachers to adapt their discourse to the needs of students in the first month of their studies. Also prospective maritime education students will find useful to reflect on the positive aspects and dissuading factors of this profession, in order to make a well informed choice of profession.

Theoretical bases of the research

In this section we present first the concept of generation applied to youngsters, then the theory of career motivation and barriers underpinning the research.

Concept of generation: Generations’ issue is becoming crucial for adjusting educational approaches and to provide qualitative carrier information to diverse students. The diversity of students requires making changes in teaching and learning approaches (Hebblethwaite, 2010) and in carrier information processes.

Generational theory affirm that people born within an approximately 20-year time period share a common set of characteristics. Each generation is shaped by its biography, economic and social conditions, technological advances, and other societal changes they have in common. People with common birth years relate to and develop common beliefs and behaviours around. These commonly held beliefs and behaviours then form the personality of that generation (Strauss and Howe, 1991; Coomes and DeBard, 2004).

Following the classification of generation done by N. Howe and W. Strauss (Howe & Strauss, 2003), high-school students participating in this study belong to the Millennial Generation – (1982–2000). According to R. DeBard (DeBard, 2004), millennial youngster have a high level of trust toward authority, a committed loyalty to institutions, most admire a hero of integrity, build parallel careers, look for meaningful work as main reward, have an intruding involvement in parent–child relation, they are protected as children, want to

receive feedback whenever they ask for it, and have a craving for community. This generation learns by connectivity and discovery. They are plugged into technology and their learning is inductive and non-linear. These characteristics will serve to the discussion of results and the elaboration of recommendations.

Career motivation and barriers: Several factors have an influence on career choice. There is an interplay among environmental (e.g., social, cultural, and economic) and person (self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals) variables in the career choice process. For example, the quality of the educational experiences to which one has been exposed, the financial support available, the wishes of influential others (parents, teachers, peers) and personal interests may affect career choice.

For this study, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; R. W. Lent, S. D. Brown, & G. Hackett, 1994) is used. SCCT emphasizes cognitive-person variables that enable people to influence their own career development, as well as extra-person (e.g., contextual) variables that enhance or constrain personal agency. Social Cognitive Career Theory extends A. Bandura (Bandura, 1986) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) to academic and career behaviour. According to SCT, peoples’ level of motivation and actions depend more on what they believe that on what is objectively the case.

The perspective on SCCT is based on three main components: self efficacy (beliefs about own ability to successfully complete a task), outcome expectations (beliefs related to the consequences of a specific behaviour), and life goals, which include both intrinsic (meaningful relationships, personal growth, contribution to the community) and extrinsic (wealth, fame, and image) aspirations.

Study of contextual supports as well as barriers has been advocated by several academics (Lent, Brown and Hackett, 2000), proposing additional context-focused research and practice directions derived from SCCT.

The perception of positive aspects of the profession has an influence in career choice. There is a difference between prospective students’ primary interests and goals. Primary interests are likely to prompt corresponding goals (e.g., social interests lead to intentions to pursue a social-type career or to dissuade to pursue an individual-type career); goals, in turn, promote choice-relevant actions (e.g., applying for a training program related to one’s goal). The perception of beneficial factors (e.g., ample support, few barriers) is predicted to facilitate the process of translating one’s interests into goals and goals into actions. Students’ primary interests and goals were included in this investigation.

The perception of negative aspects of the profession (barriers) has also an influence in career choice (Albeit & Luzzo, 1999). Research on career-related barriers emerged largely from the literature on the restriction of women’s career development (Swanson & Woitke, 1997; McWhirter, Torres & Rasheed, 1998), and has subsequently been extended to the study of men’s and racial-ethnic minority group members’ career development. High-school students (males and females) have been found to perceive very soon barriers to their future college attendance and work lives (McWhirter, 1997; McWhirter, Hackett & Bandalos, 1998). This conclusion supports the relevance of our study about dissuading factors for the choice of seafarer profession.

Barriers are defined as events or conditions, either within the person or in his or her environment, that make career-related tasks (career choice formulation, career choice implementation, career advancement) difficult. (Swanson & Woitke, 1997). This study focuses rather on the task “career choice formulation”, not in its implementation or in career advancement.

Barrier perception can engage beliefs (myths) about the self or the career, which extend beyond the mere presence or absence of real barriers, because barrier perceptions represent, at least in part, people’s phenomenological constructions of reality. Perceptions of barriers are influenced also by several factors, such as coping efficacy (beliefs about own ability to manage or negotiate the obstacles), dispositional affect (own tendencies to experience negative or positive affect), and outcome expectations (beliefs about the consequences of performing particular behaviours). For example, if one perceives oneself as being able to cope effectively with the scientific contents of seafarer education, s/he would be less likely to define them as an important barrier (Guay, Senecal, Gauthier & Fernet, 2003).

The present study uses SCCT categories (interests and goals, contextual supports, barriers, outcome expectations, and person variables), applying them to the maritime career context, investigating the positive aspects and dissuading factors of seafarer career for prospective first-generation college students (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004). We paid specially attention to the respondents’ interpretation (active phenomenological role) in processing both positive and negative aspects of profession. In the questionnaires, questions were not formulated “in general”, but “for you personally”, as we were interested in capturing respondents’ personal perception of these aspects, not in a general evaluation of them.

Methodology

In order to answer the research questions, a study was conducted by *Novikontas Research* (NR) at the Novikontas Maritime College, in Riga, among participants of the concourse “Enkurs” from February to May 2014.

NR was created in 2011 and provides research on two fields: definition and enhancement of human capability of seafarers, educators and managers; and effectiveness of training processes for improving human capability. Four researchers are currently involved in the work of NR. The new knowledge generated by NR serves the interests of Novikontas group in Lithuania and Latvia as well as the maritime industry and society elsewhere.

The competition “Enkurs” is organized every year by the LMA to introduce young people to the maritime industry and its capabilities. Secondary schools from different Latvian regions send a team of 10 high-school students interested in participating in this competition. The concourse includes different tests, including survival exercises in the swimming pool, search and rescue exercises in fire-fighting containers filled with smoke, different ship handling exercises using navigational simulation equipment, engineering exercises using different mechanical tools and equipment, etc.

Design and chronology of the study

The study had a sequential mixed-method design, combining qualitative and quantitative methods —i.e., survey

and interviews. Mixed methods (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2012) allowed combining the high reliability of scientifically validated quantitative research instruments with the interpretative phenomenological approach, where participants construct and provide meanings based on self-perceptions of their previous experience.

In February 2014 the questionnaire was elaborated and piloted collaboratively, and the open questions were prepared. Data were collected in March-April 2014, during the 3 initial sessions of the concourse “Enkurs”. In April-May data were processed and analysed, and the interpretation of the data and elaboration of conclusions took place in May-June 2014.

Description of the research instruments

The survey was conducted in 2 parts: first the qualitative phase and then the quantitative one. For the qualitative part of the research, the open-ended question “what do you like/dislike in seafarer profession?” was given to respondents. They had to list individually what they perceive as most important pros and cons of the maritime profession for them, and write their list on a sheet of paper or in a computer that was provided to them.

Right after this, respondents were asked to fill the questionnaire “Youngsters’ motivations and difficulties for choosing seafarer career”. The questionnaire had 4 parts (see Table 1): the first one was about respondents’ interest about seafarer profession and availability of information. The second part concerned respondents’ perception of positive points about seafarer profession. 12 factors were listed, including material (salary, work stability), professional (work style, necessary competencies), personal (eagerness for travelling, love of nature), and social (communication, family life) aspect. The third part concerned respondents’ perception of dissuading factors in seafarer profession. 9 factors were listed, including also material, professional, personal and social aspects. For these 3 parts respondents used a 5 point Likert scale. Finally, some demographic information was required from respondents (age, gender, region), and a two final question for evaluating the questionnaire (“Do you have any comments about this questionnaire”) and the interest in the research (“If you are interested in receiving the results of this study, please write here your email”) were asked.

Respondents answered the questionnaire sometimes on paper and sometime in an electronic Google form, in function of the availability of computers. The electronic version of the questionnaire was set up using Google Forms to improve reliability, minimizing errors in data transcription. The reliability test of the questionnaire proved that reliability was good (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.65$).

Respondents

As mentioned above, this study focused on high school students who are interested in seafarer profession. The participation in the survey was one of the compulsory activities of this concourse “Enkurs 2014”, but it was made clear to the participants that the results of the competition were independent of this research. In analysing the question of whether respondents wishes to receive the results of the study, it was found that 33% of students (N=69) said that they are interested in study, and provided their e-mail addresses. Only 2% of respondents said that they were not interested in the results of the study. 65% of respondents did not respond at all (this question was not mandatory). Respondents’ evaluation

of the questionnaire was quite positive: 64 respondents said that questionnaire was very interesting, correct and with the clear goal. Some of the respondents mentioned that this questionnaire pushed them to think more seriously about becoming seafarers.

Data processing, coding and analysis

The objective of the qualitative analysis of free answers was to find respondents' most common first encouraging and dissuading factor in seafarer career choice. In order to prepare the analysis, two researchers working simultaneously read the answers and coded the first encouraging and dissuading factor mentioned by respondents in an MS Excel file.

The questionnaires were administered electronically, introducing the answers collected in paper into the Google form. This work was done by two researchers working simultaneously to enhance the reliability of the process. After that, data were downloaded into an Excel file from the Google form. After preliminary data cleaning, data were imported into the SPSS_19 software package for further analysis. The data analysis methods were Cronbach's alpha for reliability analysis, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for analysing the level

of data, Mean of ranks and Median for statistical analysis, Chi² for statistical significance analysis, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, and Cross tabulation and t-test for comparison of groups.

Results

219 answers to the questionnaires were recorded. As regards the question: "Are you interested in becoming a seafarer?," 40% of respondents (N = 88) were interested or very interested. To the question "Do you think that there is enough information about the profession of a seafarer? 64% of respondents (N = 148) answered "probably enough" or "absolutely enough".

As regards the question "Reasons for choosing seafarer profession", the highest rated answer were "Stable employment" (Mean of ranks MR=4.42) and "Travelling and seeing new places" (MR=4.42), followed by "Good salary" (MR=4.38). The results of the analysis of the 3rd question "Dissuading factors in seafarer profession" showed that highest rated dissuading factor is "Difficulties for family life" (MR=3.94). Surprisingly, the second most popular answer was

Table 1. Structure of the questionnaire "Youngsters' motivations and difficulties for choosing seafarer career"

Code	Description of the variable		
INTEREST IN AND INFORMATION ABOUT SEAFARER PROFESSION			
A1	Interest in seafarer profession	{1=not at all interested; 2=not very interested; 3=neutral; 4=somewhat interested; 5=very interested}	
A2	Information about seafarer profession	{1=not at all enough; 2=rather not enough; 3=neutral; 4=probably enough; 5=absolutely enough}	
REASONS FOR CHOOSING SEAFARER PROFESSION			
B	Personal reasons for becoming a seafarer	{1=not important at all; 2=not really important; 3=neutral; 4=somewhat important; 5=very important}	B.1. I will have a good salary B.2. I will have stable employment B.3. I love nature and the sea B.4. I like to travel and to see new places B.5. It is a kind of tradition in my family B.6. I like to be alone, far from cities B.7. I will have wide responsibilities on board ship B.8. I like risk and challenges B.9. I will like to feel part of a team on board ship B.10. I like discipline on board B.11. I like to meet people from other countries B.12. To be a seafarer is a prestigious work
DISSUADING FACTORS			
C	Important factors that could dissuade from becoming a seafarer	{1=not important at all; 2=not really important; 3=neutral; 4=somewhat important; 5=very important}	C.1. Studies are too expensive; I cannot afford them C.2. It is difficult to combine seafaring and family life C.3. It will be boring to be so long on board ship always with the same people C.4. I do not like to be cut off the world: probably on board ship there is not internet C.5. It will be like the army, too much discipline for me C.6. Seafaring is bad for my health C.7. It is a difficult career; too much competition C.8. I found negative information in the media about the maritime profession C.9. The profession of seafarer is not socially respected
PROFILE DATA			
D.1.	Age {years}		
D.2.	Sex {1=female; 2=male}		
D.3.	Region {1=Kurzeme region; 2=Latgale region; 3= Zemgale region; 4= Vidzeme region; 5=Riga region}		

Source: Authors'..

“Studies are too expensive” (MR=3.17). Another interesting finding was that respondents rated very low the dissuading factor “negative information in the media” (MR=1.59, the lowest rate). Summarising the results, respondents were firstly attracted by stability of profession and travelling opportunities, and also by good salaries. And they are mostly dissuaded by difficulties in having a family life and the cost of studies.

The results of qualitative analysis shed light on these results also. 82 first positives factors and 62 first negative factors were recorded. The first positive factors most frequently mentioned spontaneously by respondents were “I will have a good salary” (37%, N=30) and “I like to travel and to see new places” (33%, N=27). The first dissuading factor most frequently mentioned was “It is difficult to combine seafaring and family life” (79%, N=54). Other interesting answers regarding positive aspects of profession were: responsibility that strengthen character, interesting studies, possibility of learning foreign languages, physical activity, uniforms that attract girls, possibility of meeting women from other countries, possibility of getting free from mother-in-law for a while... And regarding negative aspects of profession: danger to be captured by pirates, dangers at sea (storms, to be drowned), confinement in a metal box, living in a cabin, possibility of contaminating the sea, hard studies, little free time on board, seasickness, do not taste seafood... These answers give a good insight in students’ perceptions and could enrich questionnaires in further research.

Correlations were analysed to investigate the factors that appear linked in respondent’s perceptions. There was not significant correlation between positive and dissuading factors. Statistically significant positive correlations were found between item “I will have wide responsibilities” and item “I like discipline on board” ($r_s=0.54$, $p<0.05$), and between item “I will like to feel part of a team” and item “I like discipline on board” ($r_s=0.548$, $p<0.05$). In the dissuading factors, statistically significant positive correlations were found between item “It will be boring to be so long on board” and item “I do not like to be cut off the world” ($r_s=0.605$, $p<0.05$). These correlations indicate that respondents who like discipline also want to have responsibilities and like feeling part of a team, whereas respondents who do not like to be cut off the world do not want to spend long time on board.

Some additional research questions were analysed, looking for differences between regions and between genders. As regards “difference between regions” (see Table 2), statistically significant differences about the positive factor “I will like to feel part of a team” was found ($p<0.05$). Respondents from Latgale and Vidzeme are more attracted by seafarers’ team spirit than respondents from other regions. Statistically significant differences about dissuading factor “Difficulties in family life” ($p=0.001$) were also found. For respondents from Riga, the lack of family life is not a severe obstacle compared with other regions (especially Zemgale)

As regards “difference between genders” (see Table 3), statistically significant differences about positive factor

Table 2. Comparison by Regions (cross-tabulation)

Criteria	Level		Regions					Total
			Kurzeme	Latgale	Zemgale	Vidzeme	Riga	
Team spirit	Low	Count	9	1	1	4	2	17
		% within Regions	11,7%	3,4%	3,6%	8,5%	5,3%	7,8%
	Middle	Count	16	3	10	3	11	43
		% within Regions	20,8%	10,3%	35,7%	6,4%	28,9%	19,6%
	High	Count	52	25	17	40	25	159
		% within Regions	67,5%	86,2%	60,7%	85,1%	65,8%	72,6%
	Total	Count	77	29	28	47	38	219
		% within Regions	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
Difficulties for family	Low	Count	9	3	1	5	10	28
		% within Regions	11,7%	10,3%	3,7%	10,6%	26,3%	12,8%
	Middle	Count	7	7	4	6	11	35
		% within Regions	9,1%	24,1%	14,8%	12,8%	28,9%	16,1%
	High	Count	61	19	22	36	17	155
		% within Regions	79,2%	65,5%	81,5%	76,6%	44,7%	71,1%
	Total	Count	77	29	27	47	38	218
		% within Regions	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Source: Authors’.

Table 3. Comparison by gender (t-test for equality of means)

Criteria	females		males		Sig.
	MR	SD	MR	SD	
<i>I will have a good salary</i>	4.00	.858	4.41	.684	.012
<i>I like to travel and to see new places</i>	4.70	.571	4.40	.764	.038
<i>To be a seafarer is a prestigious work</i>	3.25	1.20	3.75	1.00	.040
<i>Seafaring is bad for my health</i>	2.95	1.31	2.25	1.07	.007

Source: Authors.

Table 4. Comparison with Latvian Maritime Academy research results

Positive aspects	LMA	NR	Dissuading factors	LMA	NR
Good salary	35%	23%	Away from home and family	65%	47%
Travelling	28%	20%	Long-term work in confined space	10%	17%
Stable outlook	7%	20%	Knowledge required by profession	7%	15%
Romance	7%	17%	Danger and responsibility	7%	9%
Interesting job	12%	16%	Other	11%	12%
Other	11%	4%			

Source: Authors'.

“I will have a good salary” was found ($p=0.012$; females : MR=4.0; males: MR=4.41), as well as for factor “I like to travel and to see new places” ($p=.038$; females: MR=4.7; males: MR=4.4) and “To be a seafarer is a prestigious work” $p=.040$: females: MR=3.25; males: MR=3.75). Females seem to be more attracted by travelling than males, while males are more attracted by the salary and prestige of the profession than females. Statistically significant differences were also found about the dissuading factor “Seafaring is bad for my health” ($p=.007$; females: MR= 2.95; males: MR=2.25). Females seem to be more concerned about bad influence of seafarer work on health than males. These differences between genders and regions will be taken into account for the formulation or recommendations.

We compared the results of this research with those of the Latvian Maritime Academy research (Berzins & Barbare, 2013). Even if the students involved in this research were higher education students already involved in maritime education, this comparison can shed light on high-school students' expectancies (see Table 4).

The main difference in the positive factors is that Latvian Maritime Academy students, who are already involved in seafarers' world, give less importance than “Enkurs” students to factors stability of work (7% versus 20%), while “Enkurs” students are less attracted by the salary than participants in LMA research (23% versus 35%). The perception of difficulties for family life is the most dissuading factor in both researches, but this factor is less important for “Enkurs” participants than for participants in LMA research (47% versus 65%). Danger of profession is the least dissuading factor for both sets of respondents.

Conclusions

What did we learnt with this study? Summarizing, it can be concluded that:

40% of respondents are interested in profession and 65% consider to be well informed about it. Respondents do not think that media denigrate this profession.

This research helped to highlight the importance for young generation of social factors as dissuading factors (difficulties for family and for connections), and the attractive character of material (wages and stability) and personal (travelling) aspects: Youngsters who are interested in seafarer profession are attracted by the good salaries, but for them, a good salary is not the most important aspect of the profession: stable employment and travelling now reached even a higher level of importance. They also think that this is not a high-risk profession. Respondents associate this profession with discipline, responsibilities and feeling part of a team, but also

with being cut off the world, spending long periods of time on board.

The most important dissuading factor was difficulties for family life, but its relevance is less marked than in previous research. It seems that youngsters interested in the profession are already more aware of the possibility of having a family life, even if they are still afraid about the eventual difficulties. Students still perceive seafarer profession as an isolating one, it seems that they are afraid about the lacking connectivity with relatives and friends through internet on board. Finally, students think that studies are too expensive, and this is a new element that did not appear in previous research.

There are also some regional and gender differences: Males are more attracted by the salary and prestige of the profession, while females are more attracted by travelling and they are dissuaded by health and risk issues.

Discussion

Are students right in their perceptions? In our opinion, some of them correspond to reality, but some other are rather the product of myths and lack of information. In this section we will discuss the main results of the research on the light of the knowledge of the reality of the profession. This will help to confirm or reject their assumptions and to elaborate useful recommendation for career promotion campaigns.

Interest in the profession. Participants' relatively high interest in the profession can be explained by the fact that they have been already familiarized with it during the competition “Enkurs”. This familiarization may have increased their interest in this profession, having a positive influence on the popularization of seafarer profession. Males are preferable target group for seafarer's profession. Females mostly do not consider connecting their life with sea, even after better familiarization with the profession.

Information about the profession. Several of respondents' answers denote a good knowledge of some aspects, and an insufficient one in others. Respondents' perception of being well informed has to be confronted with the kind of information they actually have: whether it is relevant and up-to-date. The lack of new and objective information amongst young people on the maritime industry trends, opportunities and possible challenges is one of the most relevant problems for efficient recruitment (Berzins & Barbare, 2013). As regards the quality of the information they received, participants in this study, as they were somehow interested in the profession, probably looked for and found appropriate –non deformed information in the media. However, it is possible that without this previous interest, youngsters use other channels of information that are not so objective.

Stability of the work. This can be considered as one of the most attractive factors for prospective students after the world financial crisis, when a number of people residing in Latvia became jobless. This stability is a reality, based on the following facts: shortage of seafarers all over the world; international character of seafarer profession (the diploma of seafarer is recognized by potential employers all over the world); mobility of the industry: if crisis appears in one part of the world, shipping shifts to another place, where there is not crisis.

Besides that, the training of seafarers also brings benefits away from employment on ships and ports. Their skills are highly valued by firms in the wider cluster of maritime-related industries across Europe (Sorn-Friese & Iversen, 2009). An earlier survey in the UK (Gardner et al., 2003) showed that for around 16,000 jobs it was preferred to hire a former seafarer and considered essential for half of these positions. More broadly, seafarers enjoy a genuinely international career and in an increasingly globalised world such experience is highly valued beyond maritime-related companies.

Salary. Participants are right about the high level of salaries for seafarers. Of course, salary depends on different parameters, such as type of shipping direction (e.g. maritime, offshore, fishing, etc.), vessel type (e.g. tanker, reefer), employment rank (rating or officer), incomes of ship-owners' etc. Anyhow, in comparison with ashore professions, seafarers' salary is much higher especially for officers. As an example, the salary of rating on tanker ships can vary from €900 to €1,700 per month. In the position of Junior Officer (3rd or 2nd Officer, 4th or 3rd Engineer) salary can vary from €3,000 to €5,500 per month. In position of Senior Officers (Master, Chief Officer, Chief Engineer, 2nd Engineer) salary starts from €7,000 per month and higher. If we take as example offshore fleet, the salaries can be even twice higher in same ranks. In Latvia and other countries with similar level of economical situation, it is really difficult to have such salaries working ashore in other professions

Travelling possibilities. Respondents are right in this point also: seafarers of any rank have the possibility of travelling and getting acquainted with a lot of cultures, including such exotic as Japan, Kenya, Argentina, etc. However, it's not always possible to choose the country of destination, as many ships trade mostly in one or two regions. The time spent in foreign ports allows a certain contact with these countries, but not a really deep one.

Family life. Actually, this factor of the seafarer profession needs an especial attention. It is true that there are absences from home and that, during the offshore periods, seafarers need to pass certificates and courses that take time away from family life. However, absences from home are now shorter (2–3 month contract duration becomes quite standard in merchant fleet), and seafarers have more vacation days than shore workers. Seafarers' vacations can reach till 6 month in a year, instead of 5–6 weeks for ordinary ashore employees. Moreover, in a recent study addressing the balance between seafarers and family life (Thomas, Sampson & Zhao, 2003), it was concluded that the negative consequences of seafaring for family life can be minimized by shorter trips, continuous employment (rather than employment by voyage) and opportunities for partners and families to sail.

Isolation. Respondents were quite concerned about working in confined space. This problem is known as "ship prisoning". However, modern ships have a lot of opportunities for rest (swimming pools, gyms, huge videolibraries, etc) and unlimited possibilities for communication (Skype, e-mails, internet surfing, etc.). Sure, on-board internet technologies are not so advanced as ashore technologies and internet speed is slower, but it is good enough for staying in touch with family members and friends. Nowadays, when distance learning educational programs become popular, seafarers even can make their studies while working on-board. Results of this study show that schoolboys maybe are not aware about such opportunities on board.

The cost of studies. One of the surprising results of this study is that respondents are reticent to engage in seafarer career because of the cost of the studies. If we compare the cost of higher maritime education institutions with all other study programs we will have a clearer picture.

In order to obtain the qualification of marine officer in Latvia, students should spend 3–4.5 years, depending on the institution and the study program they chose. The study fees vary between around €4,200 and €10,000. The professional qualification obtained when the study program is completed is exactly the same and it does not depend on the educational institution or the price of the study program.

If we compare the duration of studies and tuition fee for other professions, for example, to get a business manager qualifications in the University of Latvia (governmental), students spend 4.5 years and the tuition fee for the entire period of studies is around €5,500; in Riga Technical University (governmental) to get an engineering degree it is necessary to study for 4.5 years and the total tuition fees is €4,300; In Turība Institute (non-governmental) – 4.3 years duration and €7,900 to get qualification of Manager of enterprises/institutions.

It can be concluded that in some of the programs, obtaining the qualification of ship officer can cost the same money and time as obtaining other qualifications. Moreover, students of maritime educational institution can work and gets a good salary during their studies. This allows them to cover the education fees by themselves, without needing to take a credit or to request the financial support of the family.

Health and security. Some respondents were concerned about the possible negative impact of seafarer work on health. It is clear that life on board can affect health and during work periods seafarers can have illnesses and injuries. Based on the information provided by insurance companies (The Swedish Club, 2012), underlying causes of seafarers' illnesses are obesity, poor diet, smoking and physical inactivity. And the underlying causes of injuries are the deficient equipment on deck, poor lightning, "cat walks" and grating damaged during loading and unloading, equipment not secured for sea, not issuing or following work permits and risk assessments, and taking short cuts.

On the other hand, on board seafarers have the possibility of making physical exercise on the ships, and the dietetic requirements of seafarers' diet are generally well respected. This aspect seems not to be well known for respondents. As regards security, even if information about the safety, security and piracy go through mass media, which often shows and exaggerates the bad sides of this question, it seem that

youngsters are aware that nowadays seafarer profession is a safe one. In fact, shipping is one of the safest industries with highly developed safety systems and redundancy. For every step in maintenance, repair or standard operational processes there are developed clear procedures. Nowadays, security standards in ship-building are very high and risk of accidents are minimized, as well on board of the ships as during the work on the decks. Summarizing, seafarers' profession does not seem to be especially unhealthy or insecure, if shipboard procedures are respected and seafarers use the possibilities for healthy life offered to them.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are put forward for improving career promotion campaigns in the secondary schools:

- Target on males, but not exclusively. Take into account gender differences, adapting the presentation to the public: males are more attracted by the salary and prestige of the profession than females, while females seem to be more attracted by travelling than males. Females also seem to be more concerned about bad influence of seafarer work on health than males.
- Propose familiarization through concourse such as “Enkurs”.
- Provide addresses of good websites where objective information can be found.
- Check in social media and popular online information channels the kind of information that youngsters receive spontaneously. Even if good information is available, bad information is also available.
- Confirm the obvious things with precise data: stability of work, security, possibilities to travel, good salaries.
- Include information and advice about having a fulfilling family life.
- Explain (or better show on a video) how communication with relatives happens on board (Skype, internet connection speed, etc.), and how often they will see them face to face. Youngster do not like to be cut off the world do not want to spend long time on board.
- Explain well safety and health issues, with concrete examples.
- Insist on the discipline and responsibilities issues, and about the fact of feeling part of a team.
- Consider regional differences: students from Latgale and Vidzeme seem to be more attracted by seafarers' team spirit than respondents from other regions. For respondents from Riga, the lack of family life is not a severe obstacle compared with other regions.

This researched focussed on students that participated in “Enkurs” and have already some kind of motivation for becoming seafarer, but who do not know still the profession from inside. For future research, it will be useful to enlarge the scope of research, reaching also secondary education students who do not have a preference for seafarer carrier.

For next studies it will be useful to study not only the barriers for carrier choice formulation, but the barriers for career choice implementation, based on maritime education students who have already formulated their choice and are implementing it. In further research, it could be also useful to

enrich the questionnaire with new items obtained from some of the students' free answers mentioned above.

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