

# The Place of Women in a Men's World from a Maritime University Perspective

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*Abstract:* Because of women's acceptance on board merchant vessels, their presence in the maritime university area is no longer looked at with scepticism. In the last few years, in Constanta Maritime University one can easily notice that the hardest working students during faculty years were women. This is one of the reasons why the great majority of them distinguished themselves as future lecturers and therefore university's administration offered them the opportunity to teach various maritime courses. This is why today most of the young assistants in our university are females. In this paper we are trying to show that women represent the new generation of maritime engineering teachers as they are the ones that quit sailing much earlier than men and try to find a proper "lady like" land job. Due to its influence and special status in the city and because of the high number of students, Constanta Maritime University managed to persuade these women to accept teaching both general knowledge and maritime engineering subjects.

*Key-Words:* maritime sector, equal chances, equal opportunities, equal conditions, maritime university, female work force,

## 1 Introduction

Since 1919, the International Labour Organization (ILO) set into motion and developed an international regulation work system focused on increasing men and women chances in obtaining a decent and productive job in freedom, equity, security and dignity conditions regardless the working domain. In the today worldwide economy, the international work regulations are an essential component of the international framework and they have as main purpose to ensure that everybody (men and women) profits from the world economy growth. Due to new technologies, people, goods and money capitals circulate easily and fast between countries determining an interdependent world economic network that everybody on this planet should pay attention to.

Globalisation created many possibilities and advantages, while millions of workers and employers all over the world were facing new challenges. Global economy led to dislocation of workers and enterprises, engaging sudden accumulations and migrations of money capitals

and in this way causing a financial instability in certain regions. Despite the optimism from the beginning, globalisation did not represent the dawn of a new prosperity era for everybody. The inequalities generate poverty, a productivity decrease, social instability and even conflicts. This is the reason why the international community admitted that fundamental game rules establishment was necessary in the scope of guaranteeing that globalisation gives everybody (men or women) a chance to reach prosperity.

## 2 Equal conditions for everybody

An international legal frame regarding social regulations guarantees for everybody equal conditions for work in the world economy. It helps governments and employers not to give in to the temptation of lowering the working norms in the hope of getting a higher advantage in the international trade. On a long term, such a practice would not be profitable for anybody. Lowering the

standards of working quota encourages the industry development with a low level of competence, low wages and high rotation of the personnel and these may cause for the specific country the impossibility of developing stable qualified work places. As a matter of fact, this kind of practices put a stop on the economic growth of commercial partners. Because the international working quota are minimum norms adopted by governments and social partners, it is in the benefit of each one of them to adopt all these norms so those who do not apply them would not compromise the effort of the ones who do it.

### **2.1 Female work force**

Except for several regions worldwide, women represent at least one third of the world work force. In more than 90 countries, more than 50% of the women are economically active. There have never been before so many women working in the whole period of their procreation time, especially because a major number of families depend on both parents' wages as far as the survival point of view is concerned. However, in spite of women importance in countries' economy and despite the incomes generated for their families, social protection is very often inadequate for protecting those who work and their families and the shipping industry represents a particular case due to its specific work conditions.

### **2.2 Equal chances and treatment**

All over the world, million of women and men are refused the access to work and formation, they get low salaries or they are quartered in certain jobs only because of their gender (this is still the case in the maritime sector), skin colour, ethnic reasons or religion, without taking into account their abilities or qualifications. Thus in certain industrialised countries, female workers get, for equal work, a wage that might be inferior with even 25% than the one earned by a man. Protection against discrimination is part of the fundamental human rights and is indispensable for workers so that they can choose freely their work place and in this way developing their potential and picking up the merits of their work. Favouring equality at the place of work is synonym with important economic advantages. For the employers, this

means more work force, better quality of it, and for the workers it means an easier access to training and very often higher salaries. The benefits of a globalised economy are better allocated in an equalitarian society and they generate a higher social stability and a wider support from people in the favour of economic development. ILO Regulations regarding equality propose instruments that allow discrimination elimination from all the aspects of work and society. They equally constitute the basis from which arises the application of integration strategies of equality problems between men and women in the work field.

## **3 Women's integration in the maritime field**

### **3.1 Women in the shipping industry**

IMO produced its strategy for the integration of women into the maritime sector in 1988 and began implementation of the IMO Women In Development Programme (WED) in 1989, concentrating on equal access to maritime training through both mainstream programmes and gender specific projects.

The IMO Women In Development (WED) Programme was launched in 1989 with the following development objectives: to integrate women into mainstream maritime activities; to improve women's access to maritime training and technology; to increase the percentage of women at the senior management level within the maritime sector; and to promote women's economic self-reliance, including access to employment.

In some countries, the shipping industry offers a way out of poverty for many workers. Employment in the shipping industry provides access to foreign currency and a regular salary with a direct impact on the economic viability of seafarers and their extended families.

There is no intrinsic reason why women should not participate in and benefit from employment within the shipping industry.

Nowadays, the problem of equal chances in the maritime field represents a challenge for obtaining human progress, respect and recognition of human rights. The maritime educational system also has a

moral responsibility in training the students to respect principles like tolerance, solidarity and respect for others.

In a specific area like the maritime one, the gender equality has always been an issue due to the differences that exist among enrolments per gender at maritime engineering universities.

There has always been a difference between men's and women's decisions to follow maritime engineering studies in all countries and at all time. Women had for years the false impression that the maritime business is forbidden for them. Men were the ones conducting this business and they've never allowed women's access as this would have looked like an intrusion in a sector that for centuries has been exclusively under men's control.

Many countries (developed countries) still restrain women's access to the maritime business (educational system, shipping, port operations). Even maritime students find it difficult to learn from a woman teacher as they do not perceive her as a real seafarer and that means that they will always question her judgement.

The relevance of sea experience for many shore-based jobs means the resource of women with appropriate skills is limited and will continue to act as a long-term constraint on the representation of women in the maritime sector as a whole.

There may also be some cultural resistance to women working outside the home, but the principal objections to employing women at sea appear to centre on lack of adequate separate facilities for women on board and stringent physical requirements.

The perception that seafaring is a man's job can lead to lack of training and work-experience opportunities for women, compounded by employers' reluctance to appoint those women that are trained. To break the cycle, adequate training has a critical role in the integration of women into all spheres of professional life, with special emphasis on improving accessibility at all levels to potential women applicants.

The number of women going at sea is insignificant, women representing just one to two percent of the world's 1.25 million seafarers. Most women at sea are from developed countries.

Women on board ships tend to be found in catering and administrative services: the proportion

of women in the crew on passenger ships and ferries is relatively high. Radio communications is another area employing women.

### **3.2 Women's access to maritime training**

Socio-cultural factors are thought to be behind the extremely low proportion of women seafarers in some countries. It is clear that if women are to be fully accepted in the maritime sector there is a need for changes in attitude towards employing women as seafarers, recruitment of women in the shipping sector generally and in the maritime teaching area, and increased training opportunities for women.

There are over 90 maritime training institutions in more than 60 countries. Many admit only men or just a small number of women. Female lecturers are in a minority and tend to provide expertise in courses aimed for shore personnel, in maritime law and in general subjects such as English language, computer science, maritime and business studies and shipping management.

The shortage in maritime lecturers is in nautical studies and engineering, but lecturers are also needed in maritime law, economics and shipping insurance. This happens mainly due to low salaries involved in education relative to the money earned at sea and in the shipping sector. A solution for the lack of experienced maritime teachers would be to attract towards this career women that quit sailing after a period of time as they are the ones looking for shore-based jobs related to the maritime business in a higher percentage than men who quit sailing only after getting a managerial licence and many years at sea.

## **4 Women in Constanta Maritime University**

Analyzing the maritime labour market anyone can easily see that it depends on supply and demand of labour. As Constanta is a maritime city with an exit to the Black Sea there is a high demand in well trained people in all maritime domains (port, shipping, officers and so on). The demand for labour comes from shipping companies, port authority and administration, companies that operate inside the port and from the companies adjacent to the port operations (pilot companies

and tug companies). The maritime labour supply is an attractive one especially because of the high salaries implicated in the maritime business. Because of the status of Romania as a developing country, the maritime sector is still a sector that offers high salaries and this way it manages to attract a lot of young people to follow a maritime related career. Recently, Romanian women have become interested in having a maritime career even if they are aware that they have to overcome the prejudgements that Romanian people haven't got rid of yet – those saying that women have no place in maritime business as these are manly business. Constanta Maritime University is the first out of two maritime universities in the country that allowed female students to apply in this higher-education specific area.

#### **4.1 Ex-students/Future lecturers**

Women have been accepted as students in Constanta Maritime University since 1995 and it has been noticed from the beginning that they found a way to adjust to this manly environment. Since then, every year, more and more women chose to become students of the University as they realised that shipping industry might no longer be an exclusively men domain. The first generation of female bachelors was in 2000 and this was also the year when women became interested in maritime teaching jobs as they had the opportunity of working on land but in the same field of their qualification. It was also in the interest of the University to attract more and more women in working inside the teaching departments because men refused to do this as they were interested in going at sea mostly because of the wages involved. For the moment, Constanta Maritime University has 14 women teachers working in the Navigation and Maritime Transport Department out of a total number of 28 members. In the Mathematics and Human Science Department there are 16 women out of 29 teachers. In the Mechanical Engineering Department there are 9 women out of 22 teachers and in the Electro-techniques, Electronic and Informatics Department there are 8 women out of 19 members. Most of them have been recently hired and they need the University's support to improve their teaching methods, to get proper training in order to do their job properly and to prove that they are as good as men in doing this.

An internal statistics of Constanta Maritime University's employment can show that in the period of 2008 - 2010 the percentage of women hired as assistant professors was approximately 90% of the total number of assistants hired during this period. The conclusion that could be drawn is that the University is actually trying to equal the number of women and men that teach here and that there has been no difference between women's performance and men's performance as far as teaching inside a maritime institution is concerned. So, for the moment, nobody can argue that women or men are better suited for this particular job. There is indeed something that everybody can agree with: the fact that both categories (women or men) need continuous training as the maritime sector is a changing one (every year there are new improvements as far as the electronic aids for navigation are concerned). And let's not forget that there are new methods of teaching that emerge every year and every teacher regardless of their specialty has to be up-dated to these.

#### **4.2 MARCON – the project for self improvement**

But this does not stop here. Constanta Maritime University is trying to attract more and more women in the teaching staff. What could help the University achieve all of the above is the European Project MARCON – Development and implementation of a quality system for initial and continuous training of maritime higher-education teachers and supply improvement programmes according to the maritime market demands. The general objective of MARCON project is the development of multi-disciplinary research regarding initial and continuous training of maritime higher-education teachers belonging to Constanta Maritime University (especially women that have a Constanta Maritime University bachelor degree) and also supply of improvement programmes according to the maritime market demands. Women are the ones that can benefit from this project as in the past few years they have been the ones who have been employed by Constanta Maritime University as young assistant professors. This happened mostly because after obtaining their officer on watch licence and navigating for a couple of years they gave up on sea-life and decided to work in the education

system.

Fulfilment of this project's main objective will lead to competitiveness rise of job opportunities in maritime higher-education and it will manage to attract the new bachelor degree holders towards a maritime teaching career with a high interest focused on women because they are the ones who do not particularly want a sailing career.

The job offer in Constanta Maritime University is not discriminatory, all young assistants regardless of their sex being able to benefit from this program for training. As far as equal chances for men and women are regarded we can honestly say that in an industry dominated not so long ago mostly by men, the presence of women in Constanta Maritime University is no longer seen as an abnormality.

Women in the maritime engineering higher-education system could be the answer to the lack of good and experienced maritime teachers that could help students understand better the sea-life and the problems it implies. But this means that these particular universities have to put out an additional effort in promoting their job offer in the city they have their base in and also to help women have an equal access to these jobs as men do.

## 5 Conclusions

First of all we should conclude on the fact that women should be encouraged to apply to national institutions for training in technical maritime subjects. At the same time, national and regional maritime training centres should be encouraged to admit women students with prerequisite educational background.

The paper points out that availability of more opportunities for women could increase the self-sufficiency of developing countries in their supply of qualified maritime teachers while providing increased visibility of women as role models in a variety of key maritime professions.

Therefore, accepting women in the maritime sector and in all its afferent domains is very important for the development of these areas. It is generally accepted that if women progress then everybody has a benefit out of it. After accepting women on board merchant ships the best result would be to accept them in the maritime universities teaching maritime engineering subjects

as they now have the proper experience to successfully fulfil these jobs.

Even if Constanta Maritime University had for many years almost only men in the teaching staff, now the situation is constantly changing as more and more women chose such a special didactic career.

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