

Memorandum

Social Science and the Sea (SSASEA)

Theoretical premises

The sea is not only a medium but a social space, not simply ‘used by society’ but ‘a space of society’: connected to, experienced and practiced in specific ways by specific people with the potential to unlock human geography from its land bias and ask all kinds of interesting questions about the world we live in¹.

For those without an intimate experience with of the sea, land and water can seem like binary entities. The land is start the beginning and and finishend; the sea is a way to get there. The land represents the rich world of human history and domestication; the sea is a temporary pathway. But in many places with watery histories — the Mediterranean, the Pacific Islands, the Netherlands to quote some— land and water join together in configuring senses of place².

This way, is how Sissie Theodosiou recalls the social dimension of the sea as a space and a place. Moreover, she points out that the birth of so-called “New Thalassology” in the USA at the beginning of the 21st

¹ Lambert, David, Luciana Martins, and Miles Ogborn. “Currents, Visions, and Voyages: Historical Geographies of the Sea.” *Journal of Historical Geography* 32 (2006): 406

² Lowe, Celia 2006 *Wild Profusion: Biodiversity Conservation in an Indonesian Archipelago*. Princeton: Princeton University Press: 92

century³ opened the path for geographers, anthropologists and cultural historians to rediscover the sea. The reasons behind such a revival are mostly found in the promotion of global analyses which take a different perspective to that of the land. However, the work of these scholars sometimes ignores the existence and the work of maritime history and social science over the previous decades.

In the context outlined above, the Social Science and the Sea (SSASea) network aims to address some preliminary yet crucial questions, such as: why a specific sociological reflection on the sea? Can't we say, conversely, that maritime sociology is simply sociology investigating social issues with a maritime dimension? If so, there would be no need for having a specific focus on maritime sociology, rather the latter could be included in other fields of sociology (urban, environmental, work, etc.). However, if on the contrary we assume that a sociology of the sea is not just a sub-field, then we can challenge the wider epistemological, theoretical and methodological implications of the discipline.

In particular, we assume that there is a maritime factor at work, a sort of "X factor", which influences theoretical, methodological and empirical sociology when dealing with seaborne social phenomenon. A relevant section of contemporary sociological thought points out that present day society, sometimes labeled as post-modern, has features of fluidity, smoothness and liquidity. From this perspective, the society of today clearly differentiates itself from the assets of a so-called "first modernity", where the relationships between collective structures and individual agents aimed to pursue some form of enduring stability. Accordingly, such contemporary sociology

³ Marked by the publication of Horden and Purcell's *The Corrupting Sea. A Study of Mediterranean History* (2000)

is oriented towards reflecting more adequately different and more “watery” issues such as the ones of identity making, global mobility, system dynamics and new types of subjectivity. These kinds of problems have progressively overcome traditional focuses like the one on the balance between individual freedom and social order or the dilemma of rationality.

Nonetheless, there is no need for deep sociological investigations to acknowledge the multiple empirical evidence which suggests that the idea of a completely passable and crossable world-society is utopistic thinking. The growing number of borders and checkpoints, the sophistication of biometric control and the harshening of visa policies are just a few examples of a caged and channeled society.

In other words, one could assert that it is the same bare social reality that is dismissing a de-structured sociological vision, which assumes that a global interconnected web of goods and information creates a holistic melt-down.

Accordingly, our network aims to add something to this discussion by claiming that an original way to challenge this liquid utopia comes from the sea. In particular, it pushes for the establishment of a maritime sociology standpoint to review a tricky ideology of global fluidity that breaks through sea-land distinctions and tends to make them two purely interchangeable fields. Actually, maritime sociology should point out that the dream of an ostensible liquid society crashes against a new solidity of the Ocean-sea.

Thus, maritime sociology does not only investigate and reflect on maritime issues, but it would be a way to reframe sociological work from its epistemological presumptions to empirical research according to a maritime factor. In other words, it is an attempt to

bring take sociology “at sea”, to reflect critically on the sea-land relationship – and its connections/disconnections -, to revise concepts such as social relations, social developments and, territoriality in order to reach a better understanding of the contemporary global society.

On the same wavelength, Pamela Ballinger points at what she calls the “middle grounds” for sociology at sea, of the sea, on the sea, and *with* the sea. In urging that we chart a sociology at sea that bobs on the middle grounds, she suggests that the most productive agenda is neither one in which the sea and aquatic remain only metaphors nor one in which the sea merely provides the subjects/objects for sociological analysis. In fact, there already exists a recent body of sociological work dedicated to theorizing globalization that invokes watery images or metaphors, the language of flows, mobility, and liquid modernity – what Adrian Favell (picking up Nikos Papastergiadis' phrasing) labels “turbulent theories.” The turbulence implied by such paradigms, however, usually involves the decentering or disappearance of land rather than an interrogation of what the watery space of liquid social theory actually consists inof.

Differently, in recognizing that the sea is good to think with, Ballinger reminds us of the need to interrogate and take into account the cultural, political, and natural histories bound up with those metaphors. In charting a course for the “Middle Grounds” we might argue for a seaborne sociology that takes account of empirical realities even as it develops the epistemological possibilities offered by thinking offshore and alongshore. Consequently, on the one hand, a sociology of the sea would still be able to contribute to classic

questions in sociology; but on the other, it also suggests new theoretical possibilities, ones that are bound up with a recognition of the changing nature of our oceans, coasts, and planet.

Furthermore, the evolving relationships between society and technoscience have an important outcome for maritime sociology, as Luigi Pellizzoni points out.

First of all, this is because a truly “oceanic” understanding of global society normally brings about some social connections models, which usually also permeate neo-liberal ideology. Thus, the same ocean as a topic of sociological reflection and investigation reflects the features of contemporary capitalism; namely, the sea and the oceans can be turned into real commodities, within the framework of a neo-liberalized concept of nature, based on “oscillating ontologies”. In this framework, the sea-ocean, like other aspects of nature, is the object of new strategies of commodification and appropriation, which enable control through indeterminacy. Such a state of things has an impact on many sea related issues, such as ecological awareness, tourism and fisheries. Furthermore, it resonates with long lasting debates such as the one on authenticity vis-à-vis artificiality, which strongly influences notions of cultural heritage, typical productions and common goods. On another note, the fluctuating ontology and the institutional indeterminacy of the sea-ocean eventually concern the dimension of citizenship and belonging, setting the stage for changing notions of identity, rights, duties and freedoms. Reflections on the limits and the nature of sovereign powers, state surveillance, universality and cosmopolitanism take an interesting shape when thought at, on and with the sea.

Subjects of interest.

The multifold theoretical framework sketched above leads to a wide range of research problems and a multiplicity of research questions.

In this perspective, we claim that in spite of differences and diverse backgrounds, maritime sociologists still share something: they look at society from the sea, on the sea and with the sea. Thus, they are able to reflect on the sea-land distinction, which allows the emergence of new social relations, forms and patterns.

So, maritime sociologists might study both social phenomena at sea, far from the coastline (high sea, off-shore) and in territorial waters. Moreover, they can investigate land-based phenomena where a maritime factor plays a role (port-cities, seamen communities, etc.) but also the sea impact (maritime factor) on the changing notions of contemporary inland societal forms.

For example, an apparently simple question such as: “What is a seaman?” is enough to tackle the impact of the maritime factor in social relations. If seafarers are the ones who travel at sea, what about the people of the sea that are neither travelling and nor floating, such as personnel working in extraction platforms, lighthouses, small/remote islands, maritime towns, coastal fishermen? On the contrary, people who travel at sea are sometimes not real seafarers, namely they do not share all the usual cultural and social features of seafarers, such as tourists and people working in mega-cruisers or ferries, maritime commuters, illegal immigrants,

smugglers, users and workers of surface/underwater infrastructures (trains, bridges, etc.).

From this standpoint, when and how does the sea play a specific role in shaping social relations? To shed light on the materiality of the environment and its impact on society (i.e. social morphology) is important but not enough; differently, the presence of the “maritime factor” suggests there is a “relational-material” context at work that deserves a dedicated investigation in terms of maritime sociology.

Drawing from the previously sketched theoretical background and trying to crop out possible blueprints for maritime sociology, Robert Bartłomiejski has put forward a preliminary and editable list of interesting subjects for maritime sociology:

- 1) The impact of changing biophysical conditions of work and life at sea and on maritime communities
- 2) Interactions between people of the sea at work, their co-existence on the ship and their maritime communities
- 3) Impact of maritime professions on family life
- 4) Impact of maritime matters on social, cultural, spatial and political spheres of social activity: institutional and spontaneous
- 5) Working and living environment on seagoing ships
- 6) Social bonds on seagoing ships

7) Time off (free): leisure social activity on seagoing ships and in ports

8) Working conditions, risks and its impact on crew

9) Pathological behaviors in a maritime work environment

10) Education, upbringing and professional training for work at sea

11) Gender dimensions in maritime work and environment

12) Traditions, division of roles in the family of people working in maritime professions

13) Social worlds of seafarers, fishermen, shipyard workers, longshore men, marine rescue and their families (system of values, aspirations, interests, needs, family roles, opinions, views, stereotypes, auto-stereotypes)

14) Maritime institutions, organizations and associations

15) Port cities: conflicts on space and other resources between city and port infrastructure needs, land-use planning in port-cities, logics of port city spatial and functional evolution

16) Maritime identity

17) Impact of maritime institutions on social differentiation, impact on maritime social identity, adaptation to maritime roles in society, maritime patterns of life (is theory of maritimisation (Janiewski) working?)

18) Multicultural shipping crews and the concept of global seafarer

19) Environmental awareness of maritime and fishing local communities

Additionally, some theses can be presented, to orient and trigger future research paths. Among which:

- 1) The diversity of present research is a chance to create more general theoretical concepts for maritime sociology (i.e. middle-range theory following Robert Merton)
- 2) Two opposite processes in the fishing industry: a) Intensive development and rising importance of inland fishing in commercial meaning. B) Limitation of maritime fishing because of commercial fishing industry.
- 3) Maritime locale fishing communities include: commercial fishing as well as recreational and subsistence fishing.
- 4) FLAGs are not maritime local fishing communities, in fact they are a threat for maintaining the prestige of the fishing occupation, fishing traditions and economic-social welfare.

NOTES and SUGGESTIONS after the de-briefing of the SCIENTIFIC Committee.

Mikaylo Doubrovsky suggests a focus on the role and composition of stakeholders: sea-ports, trade unions and civil society among others.

Giacomo Orsini highlighted the importance of fisheries and fishing policies, especially at the EU level. The European network of fisheries represents an interesting field of research.

Valter Zanin suggests that in the new EU framework program of research (Horizon 2020) the sector of transport and sustainable development would be a good opportunity to apply.

Several participants pointed out that maritime research networks already exist, even in the field of social science. Therefore, it is important to map them, differentiate ourselves and possibly establish some forms of cooperation.

Also, the majority of participants agree that creating a website (hosted by the University of Zadar) could be useful for staying in touch and sharing information. Moreover, the website can be a useful tool for publishing working papers and drafting documents, although Pamela Ballinger emphasized that scientific works should be password protected. The Scientific committee agrees.

The acronym SSaSea (Social Science and the Sea) is proposed as the working name of the network. All participants would proceed to ask their institutions to affiliate with the network. If possible, participants will foster student and researcher mobility among the institutions affiliated to the network.

The Scientific Committee agrees that in order to be prepared for forthcoming applications and to build up a common framework of knowledge among different sub-fields, we shall create both a list of scientific journals and a selected bibliography of maritime sociology.

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