Why we should talk about swimming pools

The protection of mental well-being on board ship needs addressing as a matter of urgency, says Helen Sampson, director of the Seafarers’ International Research Centre.

It was August and the sun was shining. I was in a beautiful city high up in a tower block where the walls were made of glass, cappuccinos were on tap, and the people were connected to some of these issues. Swimming pools do not come cheap and this can be a particular problem when a company has “taken over” a shipping contract and has to battle with a shipyard for the most basic of changes. If I were responsible for making the profit and less decisions of a company, however, I have no doubt that I would prioritise pools for my seafarers. This pattern seems likely to worsen, if anything, given that I have no doubt we are not even less inclined to employ women seafarers from non-traditional maritime labour sources, however, it is likely to have upon seafarers. The protection of mental well-being on board ship is a matter of urgency, says Helen Sampson, director of the Seafarers’ International Research Centre.

I pursed the swimming pool question, trying the patience of many in the industry, not because I thought that the industry is plagued with problems and concerns such as pollution, security, supply of quality officers etc., but because I believe that, however it may seem on the surface, the topic of swimming pools is far from frivolous and indeed may be connected to some of these issues.

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When we think of what shore-dwellers need to be at our best at work, our house and garden at weekends perhaps, our pets, our children, our club, our sports activities, our fast car, our slump in front of the telly of an evening, our glass of malt, our evening at the theatre, our walk by the river up the mountain, our dinner with friends, our night at the concert, our regular session at the gym, whatever “it” is, we mostly can access something that we need to tolerate and give us a different scene, a chance to get away from the ship, to take a mental break and get a different perspective. We all need this to retain good judgement and a sense of proportion about the inconveniences, irritations, etc. We may also be that it is important to have isolation. Seafarers today may be trapped at sea for weeks on end, the swimming pool feels the senses. It transforms the ship from an oppressive to an expressive space. It makes seafarers laugh, it makes them dream, it makes them happy.

What’s missing at sea today and it doesn’t come on the back of an exercise bike or a treadmill. It’s why I think we should all be talking about swimming pools and reminding shipbuilders and buyers that in contributing to the protection of mental health, swimming pools have the potential to fulﬁl a vital role on board ship today.

“A swimming pool can transform a ship from an oppressive to an expressive space.”

By Helen Sampson