



# Fulfilling Careers in the Sail Training Sector: Charting a Course for Professionals and Volunteers – it's not About the Boat!

Alun Morgan<sup>1</sup> · Sue Langford<sup>1</sup> · Tara Vassallo<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Sail Training has emerged from the work and leisure sailing traditions as a particular sector focused on 'training *through* the sea', or personal and social development. This paper is focused on those drawn to work in this sector as either volunteer or paid workers. It explores the socio historical context from which sail training emerged to account for the character and diversity of the contemporary sector, the variety of routes into the sector and the particular challenges associated with it including the dangers of burnout and drop out. Subsequently we consider the various 'careers' or development trajectories implicated in working in the sector including 'occupational', 'serious leisure', 'sailing', 'lifecourse' and 'community working'. A small scale empirical study is presented to provide accounts from workers in the sector to support this socio-historical analysis. Finally, some consideration is given to the kinds of support needed by the sector.

**Keywords** Sail Training · Serious Leisure Outdoor · Adventure and Education · Burnout · Lifespan

## 1 Introduction

For the greater part of history, humans have harnessed the wind to drive vessels equipped with sails over water. Before the advent of motorisation, sailing was a necessity for most forms of water-born labour: travel, trade, exploration, conflict and conquest. Sailing was work, vessels were workboats, and being a sailor was an occupation. Sailors were required to learn 'seamanship'<sup>1</sup> through undertaking 'training

<sup>1</sup> The problematic gender-bias of the term is acknowledged and used advisedly—the prevailing culture at the time was predominantly, if not exclusively, male. One could be excused for reading the etymological root of 'man' as 'manual' not 'man/men'. Later we use the term seafaring as a preferable gender neutral term.

✉ Alun Morgan  
alun.morgan@plymouth.ac.uk

<sup>1</sup> University of Plymouth, Plymouth Institute of Education, Plymouth, Devon, UK

for the sea', most likely 'under sail' (or on the job). With the demise of the 'Age of Sail' thanks to ever more efficient, powerful and reliable motorised vessels (first steam and then diesel) in the commercial and naval fleets, sailing shifted from "a technology of production to a technology of consumption, from work to one of play" (Williams, 2013, p. 182). People learned to sail largely for leisure purposes. However, sailing has also been perceived to be valuable for more than mere work or play but as a vehicle (pun intended) to promote personal and social development. This more recent 'sail training' sector, and those drawn to it, is the particular focus of this paper.

Sail training is typically identified as a specific sub-category of experiential Outdoor and/or Adventure Education (OAE). Generally, research in this field has focused on outcomes for participants (learning, personal growth, health, therapy etc.), and only recently has attention turned towards "factors that influence why and how persons become [Outdoor/Adventure Educators] and various factors that influence their approach to teaching" (Duarte & Culver, 2014, p. 117). This is echoed in sail training where research has focused on trainees or participants and the benefits they experience. Little, to date, has sought to establish "[w]hat is known about staff and volunteers, what motivates them, what benefits they experience and how careers in sail training, whether voluntary or paid, take shape?" (McCulloch, 2016, p. 241). This article seeks to start to address this gap. We explore: why people pursue this 'vocation' rather than more lucrative or less complex alternatives; what constitutes a career path; and, crucially, the particular challenges of associated with the sector. This requires consideration of the broader social and historical context from which sail training has emerged. Given the location of the authors, the following account is framed from a British perspective, although we feel the general observations are applicable to other contexts, particularly other parts of Europe and countries with a European colonial settler legacy.

## 2 The Emergence of the Leisure Sailing and Sail Training Sectors

From the late seventeenth century the notion of sailing for pleasure emerged amongst the aristocracy of North Western Europe who adapted existing workboats into leisure craft, thus the Dutch *jaght* evolved into the leisure yacht (Bender, 2017). Subsequently, a status-based diffusion (West cited in Kuentzel & Heberlein, 1997) is seemingly apparent, with an increasing democratisation emerging over time: first, to include the ever expanding middle class in late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries (both home and abroad on colonial service); and then to the wider public with the rise of mandated leisure time coinciding with the advent of mass-produced, affordable small craft and increasingly labour- and life-saving equipment in the post-War period (Bender, 2017; Williams, 2013). Such developments were associated with the rise and social broadening of the leisure sailing sector and market particularly since the latter part of the twentieth century.

Of course, sailing remains a minority pursuit (Anderson & Harris, 2003) and therefore niche market. Nevertheless, a lucrative sector has emerged which offers a range of work opportunities that might prove highly attractive to 'lifestyle

entrepreneurs' (Bredvold & Skålen, 2016) drawn from, and to, the sailing lifestyle. One might become a ship chandler, yacht builder or marine mechanic, crew or skipper (e.g. on one's own or commercial yachts, or delivering yachts for wealthy clients) or even artisanal fisher. Alternatively, one might become a sail instructor or trainer, the theme of this paper. Sailing demands "a high skill threshold in the sport, and instruction is seen as essential to progression" (Anderson & Harris, 2003, p. 76). Thus, 'training *for* the sea' remains crucial, as do instructors. Over time sail instruction has become formalised with specific training programs, institutions and organisations, such as the Royal Yachting Association (RYA) in the UK and its associated program of training and accredited instructors and centres (RYA, no date).

One might be forgiven for thinking that this represents 'sail training' pure and simple. However, the term 'sailing school' is more likely to be used to describe institutions or organisations exclusively providing 'training *for* the sea' (Scott, 2020), and many such schools have been set up by 'sailing lifestyle entrepreneurs' often catering to relatively wealthy clients. However, with the virtual demise of sailors working under canvas, "sail training changed from the provision of professional skill-based training to character building and teamwork" (Scott, 2020, p. 201). Indeed, the phrase 'sail training' is now most commonly associated with 'youth sailing', 'youth work at sea', or 'adventure sailing' (McCulloch, 2016); and refers to an outdoor learning endeavour involving "time spent at sea normally under sail power and motives that give priority to the trainees' development as people" (Ibid., p. 236). Unlike more neoliberal sailing school businesses, sail training is most often associated with public- and third-sector (or not-for-personal-profit) organisations such as maritime-oriented charities and youth organisations, and water-based outdoor education centres. This sector, and those involved as professional or volunteer staff, represents the specific foci of this paper.

The characteristics associated with taking to the water in sailing vessels is seen to provide a powerful, perhaps unique, experiential context for transformative *re*-creation rather than mere recreation (Allison et al., 2007; Easthope, 2007; Fletcher, 2020; Marshall et al., 2020; McCulloch, 2007; McCulloch et al., 2010; Schijf et al., 2017). The perceived benefits are variously considered to be personal (e.g. physical and mental health, self-esteem and self-efficacy), social (collaboration and leadership) and, arguably, spiritual (Brown, 2019; Easthope, 2007; McCulloch, 2007; McCulloch et al., 2010). Indeed, sail training is now seen as a powerful and positive educational or therapeutic 'intervention' which can be used for overcoming exclusion (whether through socio-economic, physical or mental difference), and supporting rehabilitation such as addressing antisocial behaviour and criminality, overcoming mental health issues or substance dependency (Allison et al., 2007; MacLachlan, 2017; White et al., 2016).

Sail training as advanced above could be seen as 'sailing with a social purpose' and a particular instance of a 'caring profession' (Noddings, 2008), 'human services occupation' or 'helping profession' (Maslach et al., 1997) intersecting with teaching, social work and health care. Arguably, it represents a 'vocation' or calling associated with the 'pastoral care' of others, and is likely to attract certain people precisely because of its social, moral and altruistic or service rationale. This locates it more within 'social enterprise' and 'social entrepreneurship' (Light, 2008) than self-oriented and

economistic ‘lifestyle entrepreneurial’ activities in the sailing world. However, personal fulfilment remains a major common motivation (Bredvold & Skålen, 2016) across this spectrum.

### 3 Varieties of Sail Training (and Trainers)

Today, sail training is a diverse sector “ranging from day sails in protected waters to yearlong voyages across oceans” [... and in] vessels ranging in size from yachts to four-masted barques” (Schijf et al., 2017, p. 168). Whilst this and other definitions (e.g. Easthope, 2007) tend to privilege larger vessels as characteristic of the sector, we extend this definition to include sailing dinghies. Despite this diverse range of initiatives, programs and vessels, what they share in common is this crucial focus on ‘training *through* the sea’ (personal and social development). Whilst training *for* the sea will be variously emphasised as well, training *through* the sea has been increasingly prioritised and foregrounded since the post-World War Two period (Scott, 2020).

Even within this broad characterisation, differences are apparent. McCulloch (2004) identifies two ‘cultures’ of sail training, ostensibly associated with different types of vessel but actually with implications for the type of training—and trainers—associated with them. First, there is the Tall Ship tradition, taking place on large square-rigged vessels with large numbers of participants and “characterised by hierarchical authority structures and a highly structured way of life aboard ship” (McCulloch, 2004, p. 186). This can be contrasted with the Recreational or Yachting tradition characterised by smaller vessels and “less formal, less structured ways of life and structures of authority and control” (Ibid).

Similarly, Loynes (2002) contrasts two paradigms of OAE. The prevailing one he describes as ‘algorithmic’ which is derived from a militaristic and rationalist model of training, and which lends itself to a marketable product and branding with pre-ordained and measurable yet superficial outcomes (Ibid.). This could be seen to characterise many if not most instances of the Tall Ship tradition. Loynes contrasts this with an emerging ‘generative’ paradigm which aims to promote the holistic, non-prescriptive and open-ended development of participants within a learning context that emphasises social justice and environmental sustainability. This relates more closely to the Recreation-Yachting tradition noted above in which the more informal and interpersonal relations afforded by both smaller craft and more intimate on-board culture provides greater scope for caring educational and therapeutic development and transformation to occur. However boundaries are more fluid than these rigid characterisations would suggest.

### 4 The Demands Upon, and Preparedness of, Sail Trainers

The particular attributes that make sailing efficacious for personal and social development are also likely, and often deliberately intended, to present challenges for participants to overcome. Hence, “[f]acing the uncertainty and the technical challenge

of sailing can lead to self-knowledge and to increased virtue. One finds out what one is made of and, perhaps, takes heart, becoming more confident, more open to experience and more self-directed" (Goold, 2012, p. xvii). This is driven by the idea of 'personal growth through adventure' (Hopkins & Putnam, 1993; Mortlock, 1984).<sup>2</sup> For participants, such challenges include: an unfamiliar marine environment full of risk, both perceived and actual; learning real seafaring skills whilst on a rolling vessel; an unfamiliar social environment demanding collaboration and sociability; and, for residential or longer voyages, living communally, being taken away from familiar and supportive home environment, friends, and familiar territory (Birnie & Grant, 2001; McCulloch, 2007). These stressors are likely to be exacerbated the longer and more challenging the experience; and potentially more acute in the case of some deliberative educational or therapeutic interventions, such as working with people with physical and/or mental 'additional needs'; and those recovering from substance abuse or with challenging life experiences who might find it harder than most to adapt to claustrophobic life 'on board' with no opportunity for escape (White et al., 2016).

All of this significantly complicates and expands the responsibilities and expectations made upon 'sail trainers' over and above their seafaring competencies, their abilities to keep people safe, and to promote training *for* the sea. This constitutes a complex and demanding workload. Duarte and Culver (2014) discuss some of the particular additional challenges for sailing coaches and the learning they undergo in the context of 'adaptive sailing' (working with disability) from a lifelong learning perspective. This present paper was stimulated by the experiences and needs of those engaged in sail training with people with physical or mental disability, and/or those experiencing social disadvantage or undergoing rehabilitation.

Retention represents a serious issue for sail training organisations. Job insecurity, unsociable hours and low wages are partly to blame. However, burnout (Maslach et al., 1997) is also a potential consequence of the challenging nature of the work. Sail training as a caring, helping, human-services occupation involves a complex and multidimensional skill set, requiring not only mastery in sailing, but also sophisticated interpersonal or pastoral skills. Whilst a level of mastery and formal accreditation in seafaring is a prerequisite for working in the field, workers are not required to undertake corresponding training in condition specific issues, psychosocial support and behaviour management. Rather, insights and strategies are typically developed individually, informally 'on the job', often in the heat of incidents that can escalate without warning. Without the knowledge and experience to know how to respond appropriately and with confidence, practitioners often feel poorly equipped, vulnerable and overwhelmed. There is an emergent and urgent need for "training and professional development in adventure therapy and greater professionalization in practice, and through better research in the area" (MacLachlan, 2017, p. 232).

<sup>2</sup> although this approach has been critiqued in more recent years (Beames & Brown, 2016; Beames et al., 2017; Brown & Beames, 2017), notably in terms of the problematic socio-historic legacy that informs it discussed later in the paper.

Such a call provides the context and rationale for recent collaborative work at the University of Plymouth from which this paper has emerged.

## 5 Becoming a Professional Sail Trainer

Given the above, how one enters and develops within the sail training profession is crucial. The ‘occupational socialization’ model has been applied to the early-career development of adventure educators (Duarte & Culver, 2014). The framework has three broad categories: *acculturation* (pre-practice factors associated with family life and upbringing, and prior educational and social experiences); *professional socialization* (the formal induction and/or training undertaken once recruited into the profession); and *organizational socialization* (the particular culture associated with the workplace organisation).

### 5.1 Acculturation

How one is introduced to sailing will have a strong bearing on whether or not one becomes a sail trainer at all, and possibly the type one becomes. To illustrate the point, we advance a heuristic three-fold typology or segmentation of routes into sailing that *may*, in each case, lead a minority into sail training either as paid or volunteer worker:

- *yachting route*—those who have the *opportunity* through existing cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) i.e. through family, like-minded friends, private yachting clubs or sailing schools. This could be subdivided:
  - ‘*yachties*’ – stereotypical rich, status or prestige conscious and luxury-oriented; and
  - ‘*seafarers*’ – motivated more by intimate engagement with the experience of sailing, developing deeper interpersonal and/or human–environment relations. Basic vessels, kit and technology are suitable if not desirable. This carries connotations of non-conformism, and wealth is measured in more than financial terms
- *professional route* – those who embark on a career that tangentially introduces them to sailing, perhaps as part of their professional training. Sub-routes might be:
  - *maritime professionals* – those drawn from either commercial or naval sectors;
  - *outdoor educators* – who encounter sail training through their training or practice settings

- *beneficiary route*—those that have experienced interventions (educational and/or therapeutic), probably as young people who would otherwise not have an opportunity, or cultural capital, to try sailing.

The categories are not always mutually exclusive. For example, one might enter a professional route either from the yachting routes or from the beneficiary route. Others might move from the professional or beneficiary routes across into the yachting routes. The point is that different routes may be more or less inclusive. The *yachting* route is predicated on family circumstances which allow the pursuit of sailing, which will not be typical. The *professional* and *beneficiary* routes are more inclusive, requiring no prior engagement or cultural capital. Indeed, they may be deliberately oriented towards ‘widening participation’, although only a minority of the general public might be drawn to, or targeted to benefit from, them.

However, the traditional entry point into sailing remains socialisation through the family (Anderson & Harris, 2003) either independently or through a private yachting club. Certain families might promote *seafarer* attitudes. More typically, acculturation is into an idiosyncratic and exclusionary *yachtie* culture that creates barriers to ordinary people, often deliberately (Bender, 2017). The world of sailing is overrepresented by those with high cultural capital; and there has been a tendency for inequalities to be reinforced and replicated, whether intentionally or otherwise. The fact remains that “[o]utdoor activities—perhaps especially sailing—are often seen as rather privileged, well-off, middle-class, able-bodied, and ... white activities” (MacLachlan, 2017, p. 227).

Sailors acculturated into this prevailing, somewhat elite and exclusionary *yachtie* culture – lifestyle entrepreneurs included – risk reproducing these social inequalities by catering to the existing, privileged, narrow market. Many private sailing schools are like this, and the more pastoral, service-oriented and inclusionary rationale of sail training might have limited appeal to most *yachties*. The sailing sector has been identified as requiring specific interventions and programs to address inclusion in the sport, particularly in terms of ethnic minorities, variously abled, and those experiencing socio-economic challenge (Anderson & Harris, 2003). Such efforts are most likely to be promoted via the sail training sector through the provision of initiatives either to the broader population (sailing ‘for all’), or to specific targeted groups (females, disabled, socio-economically challenged, those in therapy etc.). This is where, and why, public, third-sector or social enterprise organisations are most likely to be involved.

Whilst being mindful of this critique of prevailing *yachtie* culture, it is worth relating the typology to broader socio-historical considerations. Historically the *yachtie* and *maritime professional* routes mutually informed one another, and convergently evolved into the varieties of sail training offered today. Firstly, one can see the *yachtie* culture as providing the origins for an emphasis on ‘character’ so prevalent in sail training today. The notion of the ‘Corinthian spirit’ emerged amongst the upper and middle class public-school-educated Victorian male elite (Bender, 2017). This was characterised by amateur enjoyment of sports amongst wealthy elites and underpinned by ‘athleticism’, an ideology suited to Empire builders which

emphasised self-sufficiency, courage, ‘pluck’ and heroism in challenging circumstances (Ibid.). In the sailing world, the tradition gave rise to the many eponymic private gentlemen’s ‘Corinthian Sailing Clubs’ around the British Empire that were all too often deliberately exclusionary, chauvinistic, hierarchical and supremacist (in terms of class, gender and race) (Ibid.), a culture that unfortunately still persists today in some circles.

However, some clubs evolved to become much more family-oriented and inclusive, albeit still predominantly serving the middle class. Some exceptional ‘patrician philanthropists’ (McCulloch, 2016) also emerged from this milieu who sought to break through class boundaries and use their private vessels for more progressive, democratic and inclusive purposes. The story of the Lady Raynes’ work in 1970s and 80 s London with a group of young men in care and ‘at risk’ – the Tuesday Boys (early *beneficiaries*, many of whom transitioned into *professional maritime* careers) – represents an illustrative case (Raynes, 1991). Such social experiments proved very influential in contemporary sail training interventions.

Within the professional sectors, as the age of sail came an end, sail training was perceived as still valuable for leadership development, and was largely reserved for training officer cadets (Scott, 2020). This is arguably the origins of the Tall Ships tradition with its emphasis on hierarchies, roles and procedures. This shared many of the Corinthian masculinist, patriarchal and heroic emphases on overcoming challenge which reveals the often shared and mutually reinforcing nature of militaristic and elite cultures (Bender, 2017; Loynes, 2008). However, an alternative strand emerged from within the merchant profession during the Second World War oriented towards “the drown proofing of merchant sailors” (Loynes, 2008, p. 85). This represented a new strand based on the ideas of Kurt Hahn aimed at developing “self-regulation, social competence, leadership, and social responsibility” (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014, p. 101) of ordinary people. The Aberdovey Sea School became the testing ground for this new approach which eventually grew beyond the professional sphere and evolved into the Outward Bound Movement, arguably kick-starting the contemporary OAE field (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014; Loynes, 2008). These various interweaving streams in the social history of sail training have generated the diverse field of today.

## 5.2 Professional and Organizational Socialization

From whichever entry point, a minority might choose to progress into sail training as a career which leads to the next dimensions of the model, *professional* and *organizational socialization*. These might be sequential, such as with those practitioners who undertake formal Further or Higher education (for example in OAE) and then enter a specific workplace. However, many practitioners enter through informal, apprenticeship routes and learn on the job in which case *professional* and *organizational socialization* will be simultaneous and iterative. Not all such *occupational socialization* will be equal given the different traditions discussed earlier, and people might be attracted to, or moulded into, one type of sail training/trainer or another. Thus, some will be socialised more into a coaching



orientation foregrounding training *for* the sea with little critical consideration of wider social and pedagogical issues; whilst others will emphasise the social purposes and challenges of training *through* the sea. More traditional, conservative or authoritarian organisations might reproduce existing exclusionary practices and norms; or constrain and undermine the effects of progressive and innovative education to fit the prevailing organisational modes and preferences (Duarte & Culver, 2014). Other organisations will be more informal, non-hierarchical, open and nurturing.

## **6 Multiple ‘Career’ Progressions implicated in Sail Training (paid or voluntary): Occupational, Serious Leisure, Sailing, Life course, and/or Social Working**

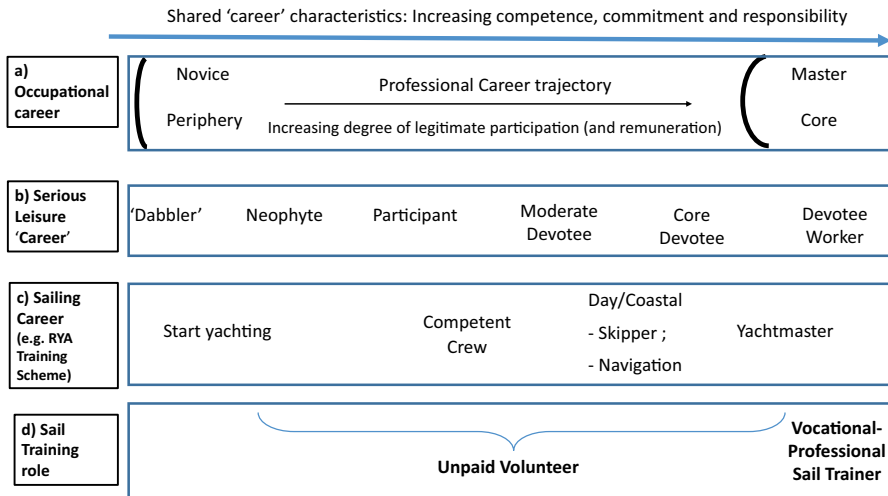
### **6.1 Occupational /Professional Career Development**

The ‘occupational socialization’ model accounts for the formal and informal processes involved in entering paid employment. Once achieved, this opens up the possibility of following a career trajectory from ‘early career’ novice, who progresses over time through mentoring, experience and legitimate peripheral participation, to higher levels of expertise, seniority and responsibility towards the level of an acknowledged ‘master’ at the core of the profession (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Sail training can represent such a career progression, and this is one intended meaning of the title for this paper. However, sail training also presents opportunities for people to contribute on a more informal, volunteer or enthusiast/amateur route. Here the ‘Serious Leisure Perspective’ (SLP; Davidson & Stebbins, 2011; Stebbins, 2014) is highly pertinent.

### **6.2 Serious Leisure**

Echoing the occupational/professional career path, the SLP trajectory advances along a non-work/unpaid, personally motivated trajectory from the entry level dabbler who participates in a casual manner via neophyte, participant, moderate devotee, core devotee with increasing commitment and competence. A final stage – that of devotee worker, characterises those who have achieved a level of expertise at which they are able to turn their leisure pursuit into paid employment. At this stage, the Occupational and Serious Leisure perspectives come together.

The particular value of the SLP is the emphasis placed on personal fulfilment or “optimal happiness, well-being, and positive lifestyle” (Stebbins, 2014, p. viii) expressed as both personal and social ‘substantial rewards’ (Stebbins, 2007). This provides a connection to ‘lifestyle entrepreneurs’ who seek to create an occupation oriented more around their preferred activity and a good work-life balance than typical profit-income motives (Brevold & Skålén, 2016). Arguably, however,



**Fig. 1** Shared characteristics of careers in (or progress within): **a)** Communities of Practice; **b)** Serious Leisure; **c)** Leisure Sailing; and **d)** Sail Training (adapted and extended from Davidson & Stebbins, 2011; Stebbins, 2014)

sail trainers, paid or voluntary, have an additional pastoral or *social* entrepreneurial dimension to their suite of motivations. The possibility of realising such a doubly rewarding career – for self *and* others – is another intended meaning of the title of this paper.

### 6.3 Sailing

Whether for paid work or leisure, it is also possible to identify a 'career' progression specifically in terms sailing. The Royal Yachting Association (RYA) provides a National Training Scheme for the UK context, which ranges from beginner through to professional: Start yachting; Competent Crew; Day/Coastal – Skipper; Navigation; Yachtmaster. The higher levels and certification opens up the possibility of a career in sailing. Some might elect to work in the luxury sailing sector serving wealthy clients as chartered crew or transporters; or, for those that eschew relative financial remuneration or, more likely, a hedonistic lifestyle for a more social service oriented approach, enter the world of sail training. Alternatively, one might identify a more professional sailing-specific qualification trajectory *within* the Sail Training sector itself, progressing from deckhand to senior deckhand, to bosun and, with further formal professional accreditation, on to more senior and responsible roles (Easthope, 2007) such as Chief Instructor, Operations Manager, First Mate or Skipper. Figure 1. Attempts to map these various 'careers' in terms of their general trajectory.

A crucial qualification of these general linear developmental 'career' models need to be made. Progression up to the higher 'devotee' or professional levels are more the exception than the rule (Kuentzel & Heberlein, 2008). Furthermore, whilst evidence supports this linear self-developmental progression in leisure sailing (Kuentzel & Heberlein, 1997), external forces such as social status and life stages are also

seen to be relevant which could arrest, disrupt or regress this apparently unidirectional model (Aversa, 1986, 1990; Kuentzel & Heberlein, 1997, 2008). These are crucial issues which might prove highly relevant both to recruitment into, retention within, or drop out from, the sail training world as either professional or volunteer. This brings to consideration a broader relevant ‘career’ path, that of the life course.

#### 6.4 Life course

Developmental psychology considers evolving or emerging life stages and tasks across the life course (Hutteman et al., 2014) which has been applied to marine forms of adventure, including sailing (Morgan, 2019). Typically, distinctions are made between childhood and youth when the self is being formed as an autonomous social being; early adulthood when establishing work and family life become paramount; and later adulthood associated with a desire to achieve personal integrity, self-transcendence and generativity or the passing on of one’s legacy. This final category is not to be confused with Loynes’ notion of the ‘generative paradigm’ which describes an educational orientation. However, the coincidence is perhaps fortuitous since both are concerned with a ‘service to others’ and pastoral orientation. Each of these three broad phases are pertinent in sail training, although as noted earlier, research tends to be focused on the developmental benefits in, and for, childhood and youth as clients or beneficiaries.

This paper focuses attention on the adult facilitators – paid or volunteer – involved in sail training who are likely to be drawn from both early and later phases of adulthood. Younger adults might be attracted to sail training – as volunteers or workers – to pursue its ‘substantial rewards’ at a time when other life course pressures have yet to intervene. Tensions arise as other life-tasks become prominent, notably the desire to settle down and start a family which is often very difficult within the constraints of the sector (low-pay, job insecurity and unsocial working hours). This, along with physical degradation, can account for some people leaving the profession as they get older. Conversely, later adulthood represents a phase when one might wish to put additional free-time (children having ‘flown the nest’ or retirement) to productive use to achieve personal integrity, self-transcendence and generativity. Volunteering offers such an opportunity (Percy & Rogers, 2021; Tabassum et al., 2016). One need not be particularly advanced along the SLP sailing career, since welcome contributions include land-based support such as fund-raising, catering or mentoring. On the other hand, those who have progressed far along the maritime professional *or* serious leisure ladders, could provide their substantial seafaring expertise as unpaid sail trainers.

#### 6.5 Community Work

However, it is unlikely that anyone will emerge from any of these ‘career’ paths – occupational, Serious Leisure/Sailing, life-course—fully equipped to deal with the full range of challenges sail training presents. There may of course be

exceptions, such as people who get involved with sail training with a professional background in education or social work. Generally, however, a significant gap in pastoral knowledge and skills is characteristic of the sector, and could account for significant burnout and problems of retention as discussed above. Consequently, we wish to acknowledge the importance of another relevant career in the dual sense of profession and/or developmental trajectory, namely that of community work, understood to cover work engaged in by whomever, to improve the lives of people, groups and societies, which subsumes neighbourhood and community development and social work (Morgan, 2012; Twelvetrees, 2008). Such work specifically demands the development of sophisticated interpersonal soft skills.

By way of illustration, the British Association of Social Work (BASW) has generated a Professional Competencies Framework (British Association of Social Workers, 2018) which relates to nine areas of competency that maps out the extensive and multidimensional range of skills and knowledge required for 'social working':

- a) Professionalism
- b) Values and ethics
- c) Diversity and equality
- d) Rights, justice and economic wellbeing
- e) Knowledge
- f) Critical reflection and analysis
- g) Skills and interventions
- h) Contexts and organisation
- i) Professional leadership

This also recognises an associated career trajectory in terms of nine levels of professional qualification/career progression:

- 1. Point of entry to training
- 2. Readiness to practice
- 3. End of first placement
- 4. End of last placement/completion
- 5. Newly Qualified Social Worker (ASYE level)
- 6. Social Worker
- 7. Experienced Social Worker
- 8. Advanced Social Worker
- 9. Strategic Social Worker

Arguably, sail trainers can be placed in situations warranting the competencies across some, if not all nine areas; and at levels 4 and above. However they do this without any of the requisite training and psychological protection this type of knowledge affords professional social workers, leading to even greater potential for burnout than is prevalent amongst those *with* such training. Such

situations could undermine any personal reward they might otherwise feel through sharing their joy of sailing or mentoring others (key motivators for entering the sector in the first place); or equally distressing, lead to ‘depersonalisation’, a “callous or even dehumanized perception others” (Maslach et al., 1997, p. 192), including most troublingly, clients they work with. Simply put, the potential for a *fulfilling* career in sail training is compromised.

## 7 Empirical Soundings

The foregoing discussion represents a rather abstract and theoretical navigation of the complex field of sail training that demands a ‘view from the deck’. Consequently, the University of Plymouth has teamed up with local Sail Training organisations and practitioners to pursue Participatory Action Research (PAR) to inform theory, practice and action (Pain et al., 2007). A deliberative, emergent and collaborative ‘Community of Practice’ (COP) has been assembled, comprising individuals – academics and practitioners – from various relevant fields of work: education, maritime industry, social work, and, of course, sail training. In addition, the COP includes sailors from each entry point: *yachting*, *professional* and *beneficiary*; and paid or volunteer roles. The rationale of the COP is to creatively explore synergies between education, social work and sail training with a view to supporting practitioners.

Part of this PAR process has involved a small scale survey of sail training practitioners. We refer to this small scale study figurately here as a ‘sounding’ in reference to the maritime tradition of dropping a plumb-line to make a quick and admittedly superficial sample test of depth and seafloor features; and also the desire to enrich our understandings through including the voices of actual practitioners. Prince and Fletcher (2019) argue that volunteers are key to sail training operations so in addition to paid staff (devotee workers) already involved in the COP, we were particularly keen to include volunteers in this process. Together, they represented various positions along the SLP spectrum from participant through to core devotees.

The two sail training organisations involved in the COP from which subjects were drawn have agreed to waive their anonymity. They are ‘Horizons Plymouth’ and ‘Sailing Tectona’ who both use sail training as a model to inspire positive change in people’s lives and promote participants’ confidence, resilience, and ability to work as a team member. Both are third sector organisations with charitable status. In terms of the earlier typologies, although Tectona technically uses vessels that could be described as small Tall Ships, both organisations would be characterised as being at the ‘recreational-yachting’ and/or ‘generative’ ends of the spectrum. However they utilise different approaches to achieve their ends and are rather different in character.

Horizons Plymouth is a children’s sailing charity based in Mayflower Marina, Plymouth, UK. They serve young people aged 8–19 who live in the local area and are disadvantaged or have a disability/learning difficulty. To achieve their aims they run after-school and weekend sailing clubs, educational sessions for groups and RYA sailing courses during the summer holidays. Typically, they use modified modern sailing dinghies but also have some larger modern keel vessels. There are two professional sailing staff. The Operations Manager (male, 36) could be characterised

as having followed a *yachting* route into the sector, although their father had come from a maritime profession (submariner). Subsequently, they progressed through professional and organisational socialisation routes through their Maritime Leisure Management studies course and management training on placement within the sector. The Chief Instructor (female, 26) also had a *yachting* entry point, also through sailing with her father. Subsequently, she gained requisite water sports qualifications, allowing her to enter paid employment. Neither would identify with the *yachtie* stereotype. They are supported by a large number of volunteers who occupy various positions along the Sailing/Serious Leisure career. For example, many work in fundraising and other land-based support roles; whereas one key semi-retired volunteer and Trustee has a maritime professional background and contributes extensively to water-based activities.

The second organisation is Sailing Tectona which uses two large heritage vessels based out of the Plymouth Yacht Haven – Tectona and Olga – to run residential sail training voyages for youth groups, school groups and therapeutic ‘Recovery Voyages’. The origins of Sailing Tectona are informative. The vision was that of the late Roger Crabtree MD who, after retiring from General Practice, bought the 85 foot gaff rigged ketch Tectona which he used to pursue rehabilitation work with those recovering from mental health issues and substance abuse (Crabtree, 2019). In terms of the earlier discussion he could be characterised a ‘patrician philanthropist’ somewhere between the *yachtie* and *seafarer* characterisation. Regrettably, Roger suffered a stroke in October 2018 on-board his personal yacht whilst sailing in Plymouth Sound, doing what he loved. He passed a few days later in hospital. The current sailing staff – 3 males and 3 females, all in their late 20 s or early 30 s—came variously through either *yachting* (of the *seafaring* variety) or *beneficiary* routes (including through Scout group or Tall Ships racing) into sailing. Again, none would identify with the *yachtie* stereotype. They are supported by an older female colleague who is focused predominantly on land-based fund-raising, but who has a background as a volunteer in adaptive Tall Ships sail training.

## 7.1 Methodology

Interviewing participants is a well-documented method of collecting data that has been used in several previous studies of sail training (McCulloch et al., 2010). Semi-structured interviews were undertaken in context, both on board a sail training vessel for Tectona and at a sail training venue for Horizons. Nine (N=9) interviews were undertaken in total. Interviewees were selected based on their involvement with the two Sail Training organisations as either paid staff (N=5) or volunteers (N=4). The semi-structured interview schedule explored:

- a) The career trajectory (professional and/or serious leisure/volunteer) that had brought people to the field of sail training (biographical details)
- b) Key issues they felt were pertinent to the field and their work in it (gaps in knowledge, particular challenges etc.)

- c) What support they feel is necessary to support them and people like them or, more particularly, early entrants into the field of sail training to equip them to be better able to cope with the rigours of this profession.

The interviews were recorded, transcribed and then subjected to thematic analysis. Nowell et al. (2017) argue that thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that is used successfully across a range of epistemologies, research questions and contexts. They state, “to be accepted as trustworthy, qualitative researchers must demonstrate that data analysis has been conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner through recording, systematising, and disclosing the methods of analysis with enough detail to enable the reader to determine whether the process is credible” (p.1). They add that thematic analysis is a highly flexible approach for summarising key features of a data set. However, Holloway and Todres, (2003) do warn that the flexibility can lead to inconsistency when developing the themes. In order to address this weakness, interviews were analysed and themes extracted by multiple researchers and coding compared to ensure interrater reliability and analysis consistency from natural interpretative variances, as far as possible. Transcripts were then coded and organised, using NVivo software, under guidelines agreed upon by the research team. Participants’ statements are provided in order to support and verify the emerging themes. Ethical procedures in line with the University of Plymouth’s protocols were followed. All participants had the right to withdraw, and are anonymised (numbered) in the accounts that follow. The coding system indicated whether a volunteer (V) or paid staff (S), gender (M or F), and age. All recordings of interviews were uploaded and stored on a secured university network.

## 7.2 Entry points and Motivations

The first area of interest was establishing what brought participants to the field of sail training? The majority were introduced to sail training through a childhood opportunity that is they had already experienced a degree of ‘acculturation’ into sailing and sail training. Some participants had sailed with family members or received a sailing course as a gift which could characterise them as having come from a *yachting* background. Others had had careers in the maritime sector, so could be seen as *maritime professionals*. Many had been on sail training experiences themselves, so could also be characterised as *beneficiaries*, often of the organisations that they were now volunteering or working with. It is apparent that these categories are not mutually exclusive, but overlapping. However, few if any would be characterised as *yachties*, and *seafarers* would more aptly describe most.

*‘I was fortunate enough to learn sailing as I was growing up and understanding that not everybody can necessarily afford to do that’ (S1: M, mid 30s)*

*‘I started sailing when I was 16. I came on a sail training voyage with my school and I had never been sailing before that’ (S4: F, late 20s)*

*‘I first got involved with sailing through Horizons. My mum read an article in the newspaper when I was nine years old’ (V2: M, mid 20s)*

*'I got a sailing course as a 15th birthday present down in Cornwall, which was 55 years ago. I then started sailing with the school sailing club, then went onto sailing with the Ocean Youth Club' (V1: M, 69)*

It should be noted that this last respondent appears to have followed the *beneficiary* route into sailing, but subsequently followed a *professional* route when he joined the Royal Navy.

Overwhelmingly, the reason that participants are all still involved in sail training is that they want to make a positive difference in someone else's life. They find the sail training role rewarding, fulfilling and intrinsically motivating, despite the obvious challenges. A sense of service and human value is innate, and sail training is seen to be preferable to other forms of work or activity, as the following comments assert:

*[Sail training] is more rewarding than the commercial world... it can be quite pivotal in some people's lives' (S1: M, mid 30s)*

*'sail training as we see it is actually a bit deeper, it's a lot more meaningful for the people...I get to do what I love doing which is sailing and also making people feel a little bit better about themselves, we might actually be doing some good' (S2: F, mid 20s)*

*'I just want to do good sail training rather than just being a bus driver' [sail commercially] (S3: M, early 30s)*

*'[Sail training] is also an opportunity to do something positive...they get out on the water and they're a totally different person. It's quite rewarding, and the sailing is quite fun as well' (V3: M, mid 40s)*

*'One of those really magical days at sea...This girl said, "Wow, how cool is that!" I thought yep, I've succeeded there' (V1: M, 69)*

One staff member provides an example in this following extended extract which reveals the personal and social development of a particular individual who has become motivated to move from *beneficiary* to *sail trainer* themselves:

*So, one of the guys that I met when I first joined Horizon he was a cadet and he was a bit of a 'Jack the lad'; just came down and wanted to have the boat on its side most of the time and go swimming. But, over the years, as he's grown up, he's become more engaged with the sailing. He took the time to do the courses, built his skills up and he's become a dinghy instructor and a powerboat instructor, and he's started to help train some of the kids that are coming through the clubs that were in a very similar situation to he was.*

*So, as he was growing up, he had the challenges at home. So, he could understand what some of the younger people were going through and he was able to help them and do some teaching with them. It was really nice to see that person engage with people from a very similar background and help to help them to develop and change. And it's quite rewarding to see that. So... it's good. (S3: M, early 30s)*



### 7.3.1 Specific challenges

Yet responses also suggest that the challenges are sometimes greater than the rewards. The lack of money in the industry both for salary positions and to provide the services, means Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is often lacking and finance is a constant worry. Unsociable work schedules and tight staffing numbers create a strain on paid staff. The increased oversight and adherence to regulations, can be seen as burdensome. In addition, sail training can be exhausting both physically and mentally especially if the weather is unfavourable. Personal 'cost-benefit' value judgements are continually reflected on within the discourse, as sail trainers recount the benefits and demands on them personally, whilst explaining how they try to maintain a balance to self-justify their continuation with it.

*'I love this job, and I know how rewarding it is, but it does have a major impact on your life' (S4: F, late 20s)*

*'I think the big personal challenges for all of the sea staff is not burning out and making sure that you get enough rest and not giving so much to the group that you end up hating your job' (S5: M, late 30s)*

*'If you're trying to pay for all your own qualifications it can be quite challenging because you don't necessarily get a huge amount of money in this industry' (S1: M, mid 30s)*

*'The most challenging bit is on a cold, wet day where there's lots of wind and it's hard work physically and people tire, keeping morale high, but that's part of the job' (S3: M, early 30s)*

*'I think that what's really changed since when I was doing it, is the governance and regulations of it, and we were really quite cavalier back in the 60s about things. We all went to the pub and had a beer or several. There was a lot of romance about and you didn't wear lifejackets all the time. You only wore lifejackets when it was likely to get a bit steely and you didn't have vast manuals that told you how to run the boat and stuff like that. You either knew it or you didn't' (V1: M, 69)*

The most significant challenge is a lack of skills and knowledge to handle clients with different and additional needs.

*'some of the people that we work with can be quite challenging ... we could really do with some more training to learn the best way to provide a really good experience for some of the people that are coming to us. So, having a better understanding of some of the conditions that they're living with and looking at how we can change what we're delivering to make it more open to people from different backgrounds' (S1: M, mid 30s)*

*[working with children] 'can be challenging because we do deal with a lot of different needs' (V4: F, late 40s)*

*'[Sail training is a] challenging industry and I think people do burn out if they don't get that support and training' (S4: F, late 20s)*

## 7.4 Desirable support

Respondents recognised that addressing the above challenges could potentially benefit both the sail training clients, by keeping skilled sail trainers in the profession, and the sail trainers themselves by creating sustainable careers. When asked what supports they would like to mitigate these challenges the participants responded with the following statements:

*'I think it'd be nice for us as Horizons to say, "Look, go and do this course but actually, we'll do a little bit of in-house training with you as well just to say this is how we'd like you to do it"' (S2: F, mid 20s)*

*'I think it would have to be some face to face training...I think talking to people who have experienced those things and are open to share their experience is quite valuable... I think it's important there are different levels because not everyone wants to do an in-depth psychology degree... group dynamic training would be good. I think some more training in social work. When I say social work, I mean what people might be going through in their lives' (S4: F, late 20s)*

*'understanding some of the needs the children have might help, so maybe some training around that might be useful, because there's a lot of training on the sailing side of things' (V3: M, mid 40s)*

*'One thing that I think would help and that is maybe a bit more mental health training or someone who has mental health experience because obviously my child has mental health problems but that's my child. He would be different to another child in the same circumstances. So I think having a little bit of extra knowledge around mental health and a little bit more experience and guidelines around how to deal with individuals' (V4: F, late 40s)*

*I think there can possibly be more training there as to what the different special needs are, how it's best to approach some of the difficulties that you have with them' (V2: M, mid 20s)*

## 8 Discussion

Despite the necessarily small scale of this 'sounding' study, there is evidence to support key issues discussed in the theoretical sections of this paper. There are discernible 'push-pull' factors as staff and volunteer sail trainers continually appraise, evaluate and reconcile 'why' they continue to navigate the challenges of the work that they do. Despite the lack of tangible reward (salary, job security etc.), the intangible benefits of helping others, keeps them in their posts. Deeper scrutiny of the interviews revealed that much of each of the trainer's own value base and natural propensity for empathy, tended to align closely with the core ethical principles set out within the community working and caring professions, that of service, social justice, human dignity and worth of a person, integrity and competence. Whether consciously or unconsciously, sail trainers realised the worth and merit of these values, when applied to another person. Thus, those interviewed would be characterised as

belonging to the ‘generative’ paradigm, and explains why they persist with their role despite the challenges. However, it is also crucial to note that all the paid sail training staff involved in both organisations are in their mid-to-late 20 s or early-to-mid 30 s (i.e. arguably fall within the life-span period when other life-tasks pressures have yet to increase the extrinsic challenges they face).

The one area that most troubled sail trainers was that of self-competence – not in sailing, as in that they were confident consummate professionals, having progressed along the ‘sailing career’, but in the navigation of complex and challenging behaviours and often psychological distress displayed by their trainees placing them ‘out of their depth’, a feeling termed by Maslach (1997) as ineffectiveness or a lack of accomplishment within her burnout inventory. This strengthens the argument for addressing this single area of challenge for sail trainers and others in the outdoor learning sector, as noted by MacLachlan (op cit.).

What then appears would be beneficial, is appropriate CPD provision for developing appropriate knowledge and skills when working with people requiring sensitive and specific responses in order to appropriately and effectively manage their individual and collective needs. After a period of time and with a level of seniority/extensive experience, many sail trainers do gain the requisite community working skills, but that this is largely gained experientially, through trial and error, a stressful and inefficient way to learn. Therefore CPD that also crucially offers evidence of their expertise in this area, together with accreditation, is efficacious. Developing this level of skill over many years comes at a price, as such intense self-directed learning is emotionally exhausting. This is often when sail trainers are ready to leave the industry, having become ‘burnt out’, taking with them years of experience and understanding that was hard earned.

This study suggests that what sail trainers want and need are opportunities for initial and continuing professional development to fast track this process in the early years of sail training. By equipping them with a toolbox of knowledge and skills that are ‘not all about the boat’, unnecessary stress and potential burnout may be avoided. This, then, has been identified through the Plymouth COP’s PAR as the next steps to pursue. An important consideration is that funding for CPD may be more critical now due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. Supporting sail trainers in order that trainees can continue to take part in this sort of positive activity, may be key in helping people recover from the social and psychological effects of COVID-19. Going further, we feel that this contextual study has broader transferability/relevance in other areas of Outdoor Education work and/or other areas of civil society (Eames, 2005) engaged in working ‘close to the wind’ of social adversity.

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**Data Availability** Data is held on secure server of the University of Plymouth.

## Declarations

**Ethics Approval** Approval gained through University of Plymouth Ethics Panel.

**Consent to Participate** Subjects consented to participate in the study.

**Consent for Publication** Provided.

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