

# **The importance of shipboard saunas to seafarers on Finnish vessels**

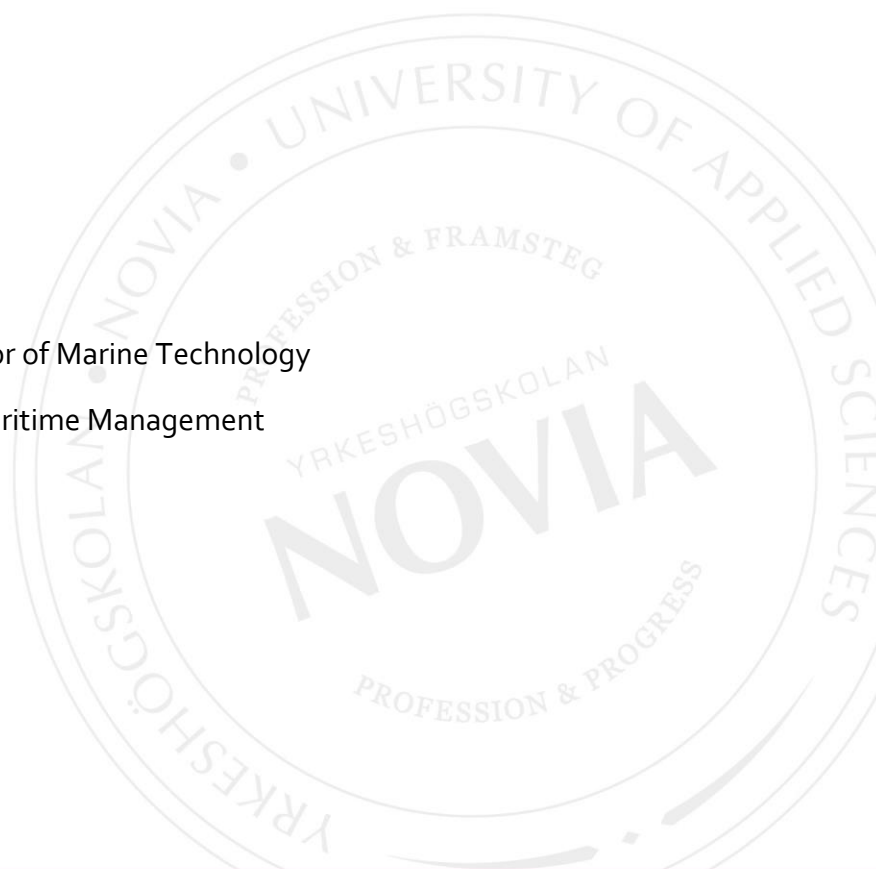
**A study on sauna culture on board Finnish merchant vessels today**

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## BACHELOR'S THESIS

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Appendices 1

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### **Abstract**

This is a study on the importance of shipboard saunas to the seafarers sailing on Finnish merchant vessels today. The aim of this research was to find out if the shipboard sauna improves the wellbeing of the seafarers on board and what the sauna culture is like on board. The study is based on responses given to a questionnaire that was distributed among Finnish seafarers sailing on Finnish flagged merchant vessels.

This thesis consists of theory and research. In the theory part details on the history of saunas both ashore and on board are given and two examples of today's shipboard saunas are given. In the research part the responses to the questionnaire are analysed.

The conclusion of this research was that shipboard saunas are highly valued by the crews on board. Sauna culture on board reflects the Finnish sauna culture ashore in many ways. Sauna improves the wellbeing of seafarers on board according to their personal experience.

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Language: English

Key words: sauna, seafarer, wellbeing

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## List of Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Acknowledgements.....	1
2	The objective and research questions.....	2
2.1	Secondary objectives.....	2
2.2	Delimitation.....	2
2.3	Legislation.....	3
3	Background.....	4
3.1	Sauna and the people of Finland.....	4
3.2	What is a Finnish sauna? .....	4
3.2.1	Sauna -dictionary.....	4
3.3	History of sauna.....	5
3.3.1	Evolution of saunas.....	5
3.3.2	Evolution of kiuas .....	6
3.3.3	History of shipboard saunas.....	7
3.4	Sauna customs.....	9
3.4.1	What to wear .....	9
3.4.2	Mixed saunas .....	9
3.5	Sauna's effect on health .....	10
3.6	Saunas and seafarer wellbeing .....	10
3.7	Previous studies on shipboard sauna culture.....	11
3.8	Foreigners in a sauna.....	11
4	Examples of shipboard saunas today .....	13
4.1	MV Prima Celina .....	13
4.2	MV Finnbreeze .....	14
5	Research method.....	16
5.1	Questionnaire .....	16
5.2	Structure of the questionnaire.....	16
6	The Results.....	17
6.1	Background information of the respondents.....	17
6.1.1	Delimitation .....	17
6.1.2	Age .....	17
6.1.3	Gender.....	18
6.1.4	Vessel type.....	18
6.1.5	Length of sea-career .....	19
6.2	Responses .....	20
6.2.1	Do the seafarers like to go to sauna on board .....	20
6.2.2	The frequency of sauna use on board.....	20

6.2.3	Sauna as a social event .....	21
6.2.4	Sauna schedules and availability .....	21
6.2.5	Non-Finnish crew and sauna.....	22
6.2.6	Women on board and the effect on sauna habits .....	23
6.2.7	Is on-board sauna something that would be missed .....	24
6.2.8	Differences in sauna habits on board versus at home.....	25
6.2.9	Open comment section .....	26
7	Conclusion .....	27
7.1	Summary of results .....	27
7.2	Reliability .....	28
7.3	Recommendations .....	28
	Works cited .....	29

# **1 Introduction**

“All Finnish merchant vessels of over 500gt must have sauna facilities on board.” This is what the Finnish State Council’s decree on seafarers living conditions on board states. Offering the possibility to the seafarers to enjoy sauna on board is not an option to the shipping companies, it is a requirement.

I started my sailing career on-board a Finnish flag vessel Prima Celina and straight from the beginning became accustomed to enjoying a nice hot sauna after the workday. Especially nice the sauna was after long days spent working on deck in cold weather. From Prima Celina I moved on to sailing under the Dutch flag and had to forget about the after-work sauna - the Dutch ships had no saunas on board. The saying “you don’t know how much you’ll miss it until you lose it” turned out to be true. From there came the idea to study the shipboard saunas as the subject of my thesis.

In this thesis the importance of a shipboard sauna to Finnish seafarers is studied. Sauna is an important part of Finnish history and is a tradition well alive ashore. The goal of this research is to determine if it is important for Finnish seafarers to have a sauna on board. The importance is studied by conducting a survey among the seafarers.

The survey was conducted in the form of a questionnaire, which was distributed to seafarers in order to acquire their opinion on shipboard saunas and to capture their feelings on sauna culture on board.

## **1.1 Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the supervisors of this thesis, the crews of MV Prima Celina and MV Finnbreeze for allowing me visit your vessels and the Finnish Sauna Society and Finnish Seaman’s Service for going through your magazine archives in order to help me with my research.

## **2 The objective and research questions**

The main objective of this study is to analyse the importance of shipboard saunas to the Finnish seafarers on board Finnish flag merchant vessels and how well alive the sauna culture is on board. What is meant by importance is how the seafarers feel about the saunas on board; do they improve the atmosphere on board, does the sauna have an impact on the social life on board, does the sauna improve seafarer wellbeing on board, is the sauna valuable to the seafarer.

### **2.1 Secondary objectives**

Not all seafarers on Finnish merchant vessels are from Finland, mixed crews with non-European seafarers arrived in 2009 (Ala-Pöllänen, 2017). A goal of this study is to get a perspective on how the foreign sailors perceive saunas and if the Finnish sauna culture has spread amongst the foreign crewmembers on board.

The number of women on working board ships has grown in the last 60 years. Before 1940's approximately 8% of seafarers were women. Since then the amount of women on board has stabilized to around 30-40% (Frigren, 2018). How the presence of two genders on board affects the sauna culture and habits is studied.

One objective is to find out if the vessel hierarchy has an effect on the sauna customs on board. In the past the gap between officers and crew was broader than nowadays, but the hierarchical difference still exists. Still nowadays on vessels the officers and crew have separate mess rooms and the higher ranks' cabins are located on higher decks (Karjalainen, 1999). A goal of this study is to find out whether ranks play a role in sauna habits on board or not. Generally speaking sauna is a place where people come together, no matter the status or rank (Reinikainen, 1977).

### **2.2 Delimitation**

This study is limited to Finnish flagged merchant vessels involved in international trade. These delimitations come directly from the Finnish legislation, as the goal is to evaluate if the legislation is still necessary to have.

The questionnaire was directed to Finnish seafarers as it was presumed that majority of the sauna users on board are Finnish and as the goal of the survey is to analyse liveliness of Finnish cultural heritage on board the ships.

## 2.3 Legislation

The *Law on Seafarer's work- and living conditions and food services on board 395/2012* and the related *State Council's decree on Seafarer's living conditions on board 825/2012* set the requirement for all Finnish merchant vessels of over 500 GRT to have sauna facilities.

State Council's decree 825/2012 on seafarers living conditions on board;

### **17 § Sauna facilities**

All Finnish merchant vessels of over 500 GRT must have sauna facilities on board. The facilities must include the actual sauna room, shower room and a dressing room. The sauna door must be of type that opens outwards only by pushing it."

Originally, the shipboard sauna became a legal requirement in 1976, when also other improvements on seafarer's living conditions on board were established. The decree stated, that all vessels above 400GRT must have a sauna, and vessels of over 1600GRT must have two saunas. (Kaukiainen, 2008) The requirement of two separate saunas on bigger vessels is no longer in effect.

The minimum international requirements for seafarer's accommodation on board are laid out in the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Maritime Labour Convention 2006 (MLC 2006), which came into force 20<sup>th</sup> of August 2013. "1. Each Member shall ensure that ships that fly its flag provide and maintain decent accommodations and recreational facilities for seafarers working or living on board, or both, consistent with promoting the seafarers' health and well-being." (International Labour Organization, 2016)

## 3 Background

### 3.1 Sauna and the people of Finland

There are 5,1 million people living in Finland and almost 1,7 million saunas (Pentikäinen & Jetsonen, 2000). The concentration of saunas per capita is higher than anywhere else in the world. There are countries and cultures in the world that have had similar bathing traditions, but Finland is the nation where the tradition has stayed alive and the customs relatively unchanged. Finnish sauna culture - a custom combining recreation and washing - has merely adapted to modern times over the years. That is why the worldwide concept of “sauna” stands for Finnish sauna (Reinikainen, 1977).

For the Finns of the past sauna was a spiritual centre. Sauna was the place where the families bathed, healed the sick, women gave birth and where the dead were prepared for their burial. When the families moved, usually a sauna was built before the actual living quarters. Sauna was a holy place. The importance of sauna to the people of Finland has been tremendous over the history (Pentikäinen & Jetsonen, 2000).

Sauna is not an ordinary room that only serves a practical purpose. Sauna has traditionally been considered a special place. One does not go to sauna to just clean up, but to relax, refresh and mentally revive themselves (Reinikainen, 1977).

### 3.2 What is a Finnish sauna?

Finnish sauna is a bathing room where the air inside is heated by using a stove. This stove is called *kiuas*. The sauna building is made of or lined inside with wood. Traditionally a Finnish sauna is rustic and practically built. Finnish sauna is not a steam bath, but a dry bath where hot steam waves, called *löyly*, come one after another from splashing water on the hot stones inside the *kiuas*. The temperature is usually around 80 to 110°C at level of the highest benches. (Reinikainen, 1977). What characterizes the Finnish sauna is an effective ventilation system, which allows the air humidity in the sauna change sharply. (Arstila, 1983)

#### 3.2.1 Sauna -dictionary

Following words are used in this thesis to describe saunas:



*Löyly* - The word for the hot steam, which forms when water is thrown on the hot rocks. The word löyly is even older than the word sauna, which originally also was a word for one of human's souls (Pentikäinen & Jetsonen, 2000).

*Kiuas* - A sauna heater, the heat source of the sauna that is usually either wood burning or electrical (Helamaa, 1999).

*Vasta, vihta* – A whisk made of leafy birch branches. It is used to stimulate the circulation in the skin, by whipping the body is gently with the whisk (Arstila, 1983).

There are many different types of saunas and nowadays the use of the word sauna has expanded. The sauna term can now include the wash, shower, dressing and recreation room as well. Sauna as a term has turned more into describing a whole facility, but originally the Finnish sauna was only the actual heat room (Virtanen, 1974).

### **3.3 History of sauna**

Sauna has been an integral part of Finnish culture for at least 2000 years. Bathing in a sauna was a custom in other Nordic countries also during the 11<sup>th</sup> century. During the Middle Ages saunas were common all through Europe. The sauna culture in the central Europe came to a halt in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century due to fear of syphilis spreading via sauna bathes and even from Sweden the sauna culture disappeared during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Only in Finland and in some remote mountain and forest areas of Europe the sauna custom has stayed well alive through the centuries (Arstila, 1983).

Unlike many think, sauna was not originally a Finnish invention but a mixture of saunas, the modern Finnish sauna is a combination of the features of its ancestors: the Roman and the Russian sauna. The distinct feature of the Roman bath was usage of dry and hot air. The Russian bath however is more like a steam bath. Roman sauna causes the one bathing to sweat heavily, whereas the Russian sauna does not. Perspiration, on the skin of a person who is bathing in a Russian sauna, is mainly condensation of the hot steam (Arstila, 1983).

#### **3.3.1 Evolution of saunas**

On the Finnish Sauna Society's website, Pekka E. Tommila has gathered information on the evolution of Finnish sauna.

During the Stone Age the first saunas were built, they were so called pit saunas. When humans were still hunter-gatherers, the sauna could not be a permanent structure. The sauna had to move with the people. A pit was dug and in the bottom of the pit was a pile of rocks. Inside the rock pile was firewood that was burned in order to heat the stones. Once the primitive version of *kiuas* was heated, thin branches were bent and fixed above the pit. Animals' hides were placed on them to create a tent-like structure. Then just like nowadays, the sauna users poured water on the stones and steam would fill the pit sauna. (The Finnish Sauna Society, 2018)

Eventually humans of the Bronze Age realized that sauna is better to build in a hill, so that more heat will stay inside the sauna. Also humans started to settle in one place, which meant more permanent structures could be built. This hillside sauna could be called a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation sauna for the Finnish ancestors. The hillside sauna already started to resemble a modern Finnish sauna; it had a floor, *kiuas* in the corner and possibly even a bench to sit on (The Finnish Sauna Society, 2018).

During the Iron Age the construction skills of humans evolved tremendously. As a result, the first actual sauna cottages were built. The building was made of logs and it had four corners and a roof. *Kiuas* stayed similar to what was used in the pit and hillside sauna; it was a pile of smoking rocks. This cottage sauna was very similar to a smoke sauna, type that still exists (The Finnish Sauna Society, 2018).

In a smoke sauna, the smoke and fumes from the *kiuas* do not leave the sauna through a chimney, but through an open door and later on through a hole located high up on the wall of the sauna, called *räppänä*. The hot smoke that lingers in the sauna heats also the walls and the roof of the sauna. The smoke heated walls in addition to the special smoke sauna type *kiuas* provide a nice and even heat to the users (Helamaa, 1999).

Approximately in the 1920s saunas started to have chimneys, especially in the cities and in the Southern Finland. Slowly a change came and a smoke sauna was no longer the most common sauna type in Finland. In the 1950s and '60s the electric *kiuas* became more widely used (Reinikainen, 1977).

### **3.3.2 Evolution of *kiuas***

The heart of a Finnish sauna is the *kiuas*. The characteristics of the *kiuas* give each sauna its personality. There have been many of different types of *kiuas*' designed for different

sauna types and facilities. What is important when choosing or designing a *kiuas*, is that that it produces a suitable *löyly* for the sauna it will be installed in (Virtanen, 1974).

For centuries wood has been used as the fuel source for the *kiuas*. In the earlier days saunas were usually built to places where firewood and water were easily available. The sauna building was built in a location where, if it happened to burn down, it would not danger the



**Picture 1:** Electrical kiuas on board MV Finn breeze

other buildings around. The world however changed and people started to move into cities, change in people's lifestyles changed the sauna as well - the electrically powered *kiuas* was developed (Virtanen, 1974). The first factory built electrical kiuas in the world was made by Metos in 1938 (Metos / Storage IT, 2018).

In addition to electric and wood fuelled *kiuas*'s, there is also oil and gas fuelled ones, but they are more rare specialities (Helamaa, 1999).

### 3.3.3 History of shipboard saunas

Most likely wooden sailing vessels did not have saunas on board, as burning wood on a wooden ship is not considered very safe. After the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war when ships were already steel, the Finnish shipowners bought mostly second-hand vessels. These second hand vessels were around 10 to 15 years old and did not have saunas as they were built for non-Finnish shipowners (Friberg, Stimmiputken höyryistä laivasaunan lauteille, 1989).

In the 1950's saunas on ships started getting more common and Finnish sailors were able to get a sauna experience on board thanks to steam. The shipboard saunas in the 1950's were so called "stimmi" saunas – in English "steam sauna". From the ship's steam line a pipeline was directed to a room or a space suitable to act as a sauna and at the end of this pipeline was a valve which was opened to fill the room with hot steam. Hot steam would fill the room and when there was enough heat in the room, the valve was closed. This type of sauna had risks, as the steam was very hot and on the other hand, the sauna space cooled down relatively fast after closing the steam valve. There was no kiuas or other type of heating in the shipboard saunas of the early 50's. Steam sauna was not ideal, but it was better than no sauna at all (Friberg, Stimmiputken höyryistä laivasaunan lauteille, 1989).

Ralf Friberg writes in the article “Lisää löylyä merimiesten saunomiseen” (Sauna magazine, 1990:4) that the visionary of proper shipboard saunas was captain Pentti Luukkonen, who sailed on many ships, one of them being John Nurminen’s s/s Liisa. Thanks to Luukkonen’s idea, the crew of s/s Liisa built a temporary sauna on board during the harsh winter in 1947 when the ship was waiting for the ice conditions to ease in Karlshamn, Sweden. A 100-litre oil container was used to make a kiuas and the sauna itself was situated close by the funnel (Friberg, Lisää löylyä merimiesten saunomiseen, 1990).

When Luukkonen became the captain of s/s Aino Nurminen a sauna was also built on that vessel. This is how the Finnish merchant fleet got its first saunas, which in fact were both heated by burning firewood (Friberg, Lisää löylyä merimiesten saunomiseen, 1990).



**Picture 2** s/s Liisa (Copyright: Rauma Maritime Museum)

[http://www.aanimeri.fi/gallery2/main.php?g2\\_itemId=24716](http://www.aanimeri.fi/gallery2/main.php?g2_itemId=24716)

After the two saunas were built on s/s *Liisa* and s/s *Aino Nurminen*, it became more common for shipyards to retrofit the Finnish 2<sup>nd</sup> hand fleet with proper saunas. Luukkonen later on sailed for the Finnliness; the vessels *mv Finnsailor*, *mv Finnmerchant*, *mv Finntrader* and *mv Finnpulp* (first of their name) also had saunas (Friberg, Lisää löylyä merimiesten saunomiseen, 1990). These ships were the first new-built vessels for Finnliness and came to service during 1950’s and 1960’s (Finnlines, 2004). During this time the officers and crew already used separate sauna facilities (Friberg, Lisää löylyä merimiesten saunomiseen, 1990).

From a ship’s sauna perspective, the invention of well performing and easy-to-use electrical *kiuas* made it much more practical to have a sauna on board. Electrical *kiuas* turned the shipboard saunas more similar to traditional saunas ashore, compared to what

the *stimmisaunas* were. Wood-fuelled saunas were never very practical due to the need to have an ample supply of firewood available.

### **3.4 Sauna customs**

Traditionally a Finn goes to sauna after the workweek, for a so-called Saturday sauna. Sometimes sauna is warmed even during the week, especially if the day has been cold, dusty, or sweaty, the sauna is heated in the evening. Sauna is often an integral part of celebrations such as Christmas and Midsummer (Reinikainen, 1977).

Different people have different habits when it comes to sauna customs. Alpo Reinikainen writes in the book *Finnish Sauna* published in 1977, that singing, sausages, beer and noise do not belong in a sauna. Some people however consider cooking sausages on the hot *kiuas* stones and having a cold beer while cooling down as essential sauna rituals. Other sauna related activities are cupping and whisking.

#### **3.4.1 What to wear**

Generally the custom in Finland is to enjoy sauna in the nude. For maximum comfort and hygienic reasons the skin should be fully exposed to the heat (Arstila, 1983).

#### **3.4.2 Mixed saunas**

It is a common belief that nudity is a natural and laidback thing for Finnish people, and therefore Finnish people also enjoy sauna in mixed gender groups. Actually, less than half of Finnish people consider mixed saunas natural. The views on men and women bathing together vary a lot amongst Finnish people, some individuals even find it obnoxious (Mykkänen & Mäkinen, 2013).

Families usually go to sauna together. Previously it was ordinary that the whole household would go in and bathe together, the young children included. Who went in and with who was just a choice of whichever order was most practical. Nowadays this has changed. Usually even the families split in two groups; men and women (Reinikainen, 1977).

According to Risto Elomaa from the International Sauna Association, men and women bathing together is not typical when it comes to Finnish sauna habits. Usually Finnish people bathe in two separate saunas or have schedules for men and women to bathe separately (Niinistö, 2015).

### **3.5 Sauna's effect on health**

A saying in Finland has been repeated through ages: “if the sauna, tar, or alcohol can't cure you, your disease must be fatal” (Virtanen, 1974). In the past sauna was the healthcare centre of the families, due to its warmth, aseptic conditions and water supply. First medical study on the health effects of sauna was published in the 1700's in Finland (Arstila, 1983).

Sauna and other heat treatments are considered healthy and they are used to treat many minor health issues. In Finland, Japan and Germany the health effects of sauna have been studied for decades. Even though the studies have not been systematic, it can be said that based on the gathered knowledge, that sauna can have positive health effect in many cases (Hannuksela, 2012).

Main cardiovascular effect of sauna is the rise in heart rate and cardiac output. That is because the body starts trying to cool itself. The body tries to maintain its internal temperature against the hot surrounding air in sauna. The peripheral circulation of the body increases and body starts to sweat in order to achieve heat loss. In sauna the person's muscles relax and blood pressure drops. The effect of sauna is thoroughly relaxing and this also affects one's sleep. Longer and deeper sleep is achieved after sauna (Arstila, 1983).

The physiological effects of bathing in sauna are similar to those experienced during walking or light jogging, except during exercise blood pressure increases. In a way, sauna can be considered to have similar positive effects on one's health as those light forms of exercise (Arstila, 1983). This offers a possibility to positively strain the cardiovascular system on board, where the opportunities to exercise are limited.

To avoid harmful health effects from sauna, one should gradually get used to the heat and avoid heavy meals and alcohol beforehand. Also diving straight into ice cold water or snow is not recommended as the sudden change of blood pressure in this case can cause harm (Reinikainen, 1977).

### **3.6 Saunas and seafarer wellbeing**

It has been a strong belief through history that the sauna has a strong positive effect on one's health. It is considered true that sauna improves one's health in general and it acts as

more than just a place to bathe. Sauna can strengthen the mind and body. It is a place to relieve stress and relax (Reinikainen, 1977).

As a work environment ship is often more challenging than on an ordinary shore-based workplace. Seafarers are exposed to several different stressors; mental, psychosocial and physical. The main factors causing stress are separation from family, loneliness, fatigue, multi-nationality, limited recreation options and sleep deprivation (Carotenuto, Molino, Fasanaro, & Amenta, 2012).

Some seafarers feel that the introduction of private cabins and the cut in the number of crew working on ships has had a negative impact on the social life on board. The small amount of crew that there is still on board spends most of their time in their cabins (Hult, 2012).

Having a sauna on board can improve the social atmosphere if seafarers bathe together; on-board sauna is a common space. Life on board at times is stressful and having a peaceful moment or a chat with co-workers in a sauna can act as a way to relieve stress. “The sauna works at building empathy, confidence and trust among bathers. In such atmosphere relationships evolve naturally and valuable, enduring friendships can be made” writes Antti Arstila in the book “The Finnish Sauna” (1983).

### **3.7 Previous studies on shipboard sauna culture**

In Anne Ala-Pöllänen’s ethnographic study on Finnish and Filipino seafarers on Finnish cargo vessels, called “Happy Ship”, some sauna related observations are made;

- For the Finnish crew, the sauna is more than just a place to clean up
- The sauna habits varied greatly from ship to ship; on some ships there were only a few users and on another ship sauna was a daily routine for the majority of the crew

### **3.8 Foreigners and sauna**

Mixed crew agreement came into effect on board Finnish flag ships in 2009, mixed crew meaning part of the crew being non-European seafarers. Most of the non-European crew on Finnish ships come from the Philippines (Ala-Pöllänen, 2017).

When Finnish seafarers start to talk about the past time activities of Filipino sailors, the first thing that comes to mind is karaoke. Between Finnish and Filipino crew, in a way sauna and karaoke are only different ways of same cultural interaction on board. In the Happy Ship study, Ala-Pöllänen writes that when the Finnish crew goes to sauna to relax and socialize after the workday, the Filipinos start singing karaoke together in the mess room. Both nationalities had their own pastime activity, but both were welcome to join each other in the two different activities; the Finnish crew could join karaoke night and some Filipinos went to sauna. Both nationalities tried to find ways to spend time together with each other, even though a separation between the two groups on board could be noticed (Ala-Pöllänen, 2017).

Traditionally warming a sauna to a guest and an invitation to sauna is a sign of acceptance to a guest in Finnish culture (Reinikainen, 1977). To people from foreign cultures, the first visit to sauna can be a puzzling experience. Before taking foreigners to sauna, the host should first introduce the new bather to the Finnish sauna customs. If one is keen to try out the sauna, the bathing should be organised so that it is an enjoyable experience. The sauna temperature should be mild, maximum 80°C and the bather should be told beforehand what to expect and how the sauna will feel. (Arstila, 1983).

Generally speaking Finnish people are comfortable being in the nude in the sauna with other people. To foreigners the nudity can be something they are not comfortable with. This should not be a reason for abandoning the idea of trying sauna. The guest can be given a bathing suit or a towel, and the host should follow the suit (Arstila, 1983).



## 4 Examples of shipboard saunas today

Two ships were visited and documented in order to have examples of how shipboard saunas look like today on different vessels. Background information on the vessel and the sauna was received from the crew on board.

### 4.1 MV Prima Celina

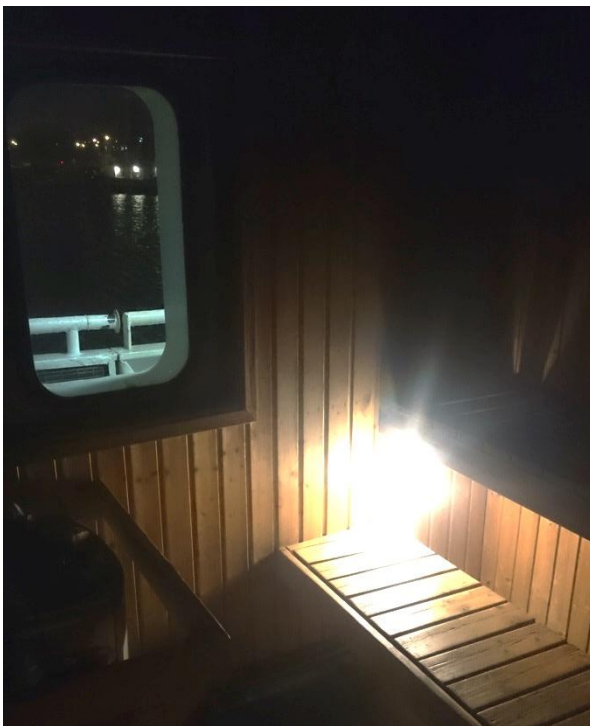


**Picture 3:** MV Prima Celina

<http://www.primas.fi/fi/prima-shipping/laivat>

Prima Celina is a small tonnage vessel built 1992 at Scheepswerf Bijlsma in The Netherlands. The company Prima Shipping operates the vessel. Prima Celina sails under the Finnish flag with a crew of five plus one apprentice. Prima Celina came to Prima fleet as a second hand vessel and had previously been registered to The Netherlands.

Originally the vessel had no sauna facility, so the sauna was built into the deck cargo office when the ship entered the Prima fleet.



**Picture 4:** Electric kivas, window with a view to the sea and benches.

The sauna on board is small and cosy with an ocean view. The facilities are entered from the outside at the main deck level. There is a dressing room with one shower and a sauna room with an electric kivas. The kivas has a timer on it, so the sauna can be set to heat up in advance. The sauna has enough space for at least three people to sit down and enjoy the heat simultaneously.

**Picture 5:** Shower and door to the sauna room. On the left not visible is a bench for changing.



**Picture 6:** Entry to Prima Celina's sauna on the aft deck decorated to celebrate Mid-Summer.

When interviewed, the crew of Prima Celina emphasized that the shipboard sauna is extremely important. It was said by the captain Nordman and the chief officer Syrjälä, that the sauna is the place to relax after watch and it improves the atmosphere on board.

I myself have sailed on Prima Celina for approximately 6 months altogether and can attest that the sauna is the heart of this vessel. Especially in the summer time sauna and barbeque on the aft deck are the favourite past time activities of the crew.

## 4.2 MV Finnbreeze

MV Finnbreeze is a ro-ro vessel operated by the company Finnlines. The vessel was built 2011 in Nanjing, China and it flies the Finnish flag. Finnbreeze sails with a crew of 19, of which 4 are apprentices. The crew on board



**Picture 7:** Crew sauna (MV Finnbreeze)

consists of EU and non-EU seafarers. This allowed for an opportunity to interview the non-EU Filipino sailors on board on their sauna habits.



**Picture 8:** Hot tub in MV Finnbreeze located on the deck behind the bridge.

First Filipino sailors interviewed were cook Lynette and mess girl Josephine who said they do not go to sauna on board. The cook Lynette mentioned having tried the sauna on her previous vessel MV Finnulp as the crew recommended her to do so, but she did not enjoy it. However she mentioned that some of the Filipino men on board do go to sauna.

Next I was able to talk to deck officer George Tag-at who turned out to be an active sauna user. He mentioned bathing almost daily after his watch. When I asked why, he mentioned that he had used Google to find out about the health effects of Finnish sauna. Sauna helps him relax and sleep better, just to mention some of the health effects he had noticed personally. He was first introduced to sauna when he sailed under the German flag on a Hapag-Lloyd vessel.



**Picture 9:** Crew showers (MV Finnbreeze)

Able seaman Nuutinen on board gave me a tour to see the ship's sauna facilities. MV Finnbreeze has two saunas on board. One of them is for the crew to use and the other one is for the truck drivers that travel with the ship. The crew sauna was recently renovated and very spacious. As a shipboard speciality,

the ship also has a hot tub, which according to AB Nuutinen is quite amazing during the summer months.

## **5 Research method**

### **5.1 Questionnaire**

The research was conducted as a questionnaire on the Google Forms –platform. It allowed for easy distribution of the questionnaire as well as effective analysis of the collected data. The aim with the questionnaire was to gather information on the sauna habits of seafarers on board Finnish vessels. The questionnaire was in English.

The questionnaire was first distributed on 11<sup>th</sup> of January 2018<sup>th</sup> on the author's personal Facebook page and on the "Skönärit ja muut meren kulkiat" –Facebook group for current, former and future seafarers. The group has 4 434 members.

### **5.2 Structure of the questionnaire**

There were two sections in the questionnaire. In the first section, general information of the respondent was gathered; age, gender, and the vessel type he/she is currently working on and how long he/she has been working at sea. In order to make sure that the delimitation of the study applies the respondent is asked if he/she is working on a Finnish flag vessel trading internationally, and if his/her nationality is Finnish. The age, gender and vessel type information was collected to use it in categorizing and finding groups in the subject matter.

The second section contains eight questions on the subject of the research. There are four close-ended questions and four open-ended questions. A variety of different type questions were used to gather quantitative and qualitative data.

The questions from the second section of the questionnaire can be categorized. Five out of eight questions in the Section 2 focused on the respondent's personal thoughts and habits. The other three questions aimed to find answers to the secondary research subjects.



## 6 The Results

The questionnaire was available online on the Google Docs platform from 11<sup>th</sup> of January until 16<sup>th</sup> of January. During these five days, 76 seafarers answered the questionnaire.

### 6.1 Background information of the respondents

#### 6.1.1 Delimitation

First, the respondents were asked; do you work at sea on a Finnish flag vessel trading internationally? Is your nationality Finnish?

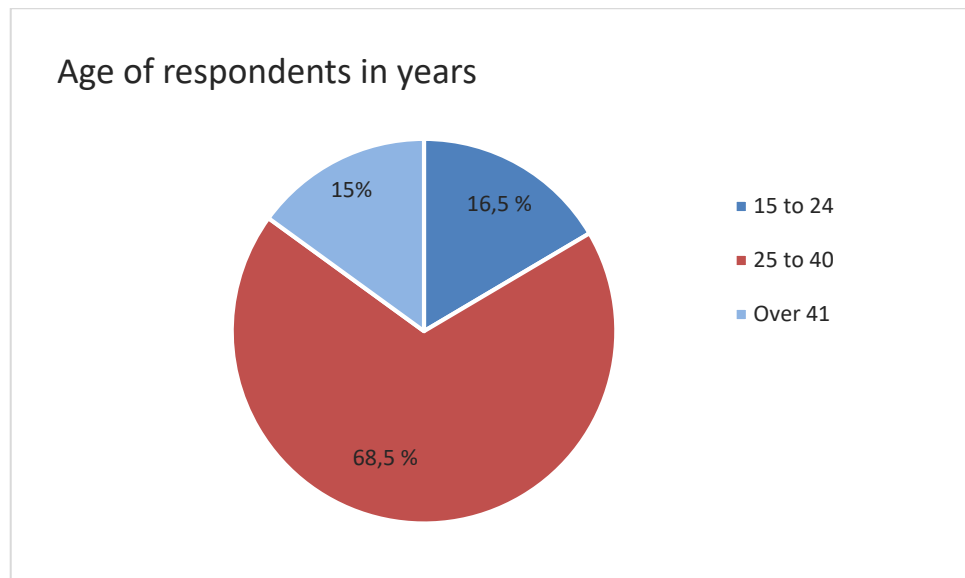
This question was asked to ensure that answers to the survey are from the chosen research group. Out of 76 answers, three answers were negative to this question.

The three responses, that gave a negative answer to this question, were excluded from the statistics. Only the 73 responses that were from Finnish seafarers sailing under Finnish flag were included in the study.



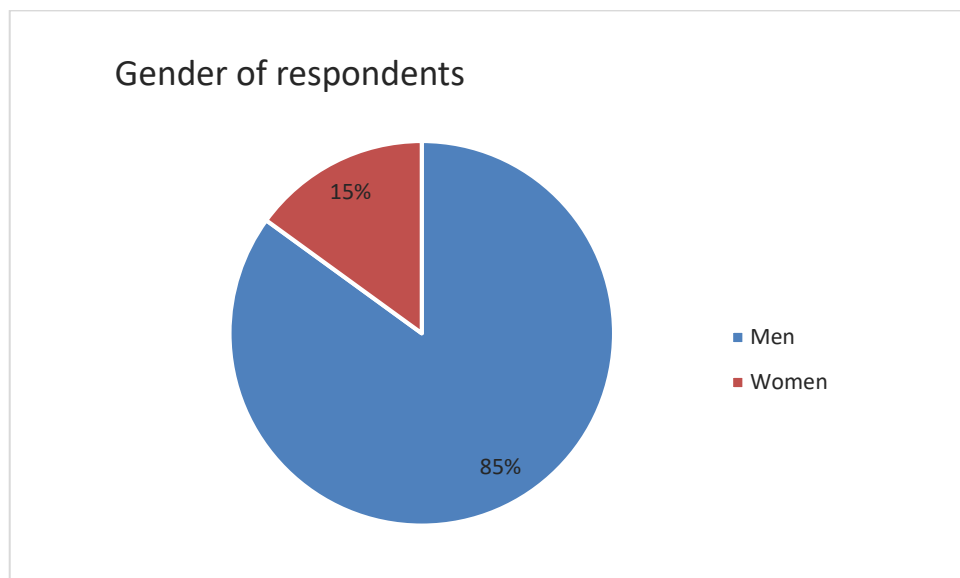
#### 6.1.2 Age

The respondents were categorized into three different age groups. The majority of the respondents were 25 to 41 years old.



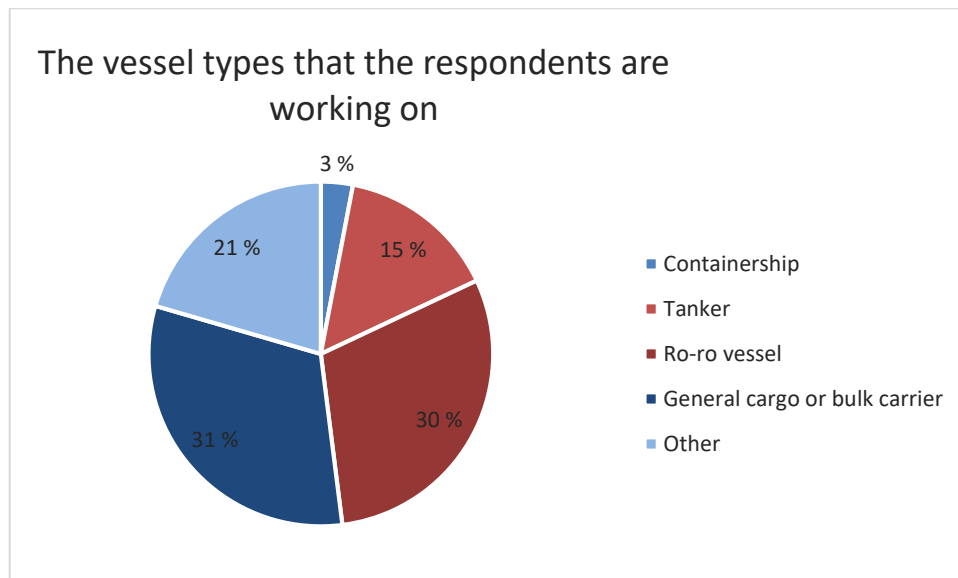
### 6.1.3 Gender

Majority of respondents were men. The gender distribution of the respondents does not match the gender distribution of the industry. Around 30 to 40% of ship's crews nowadays are women (Frigren, 2018).



### 6.1.4 Vessel type

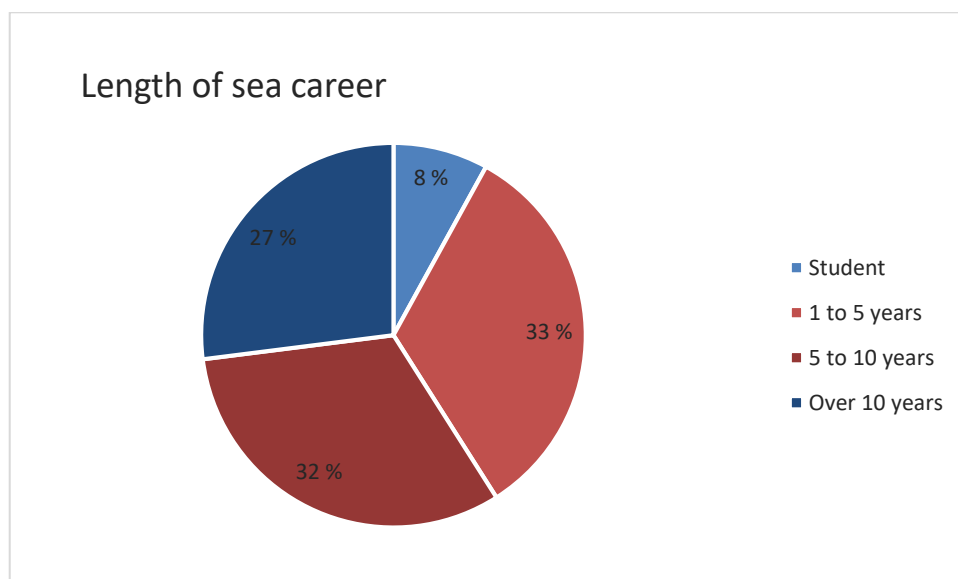
The respondents were asked on which kind of vessel they are currently working on to find out if major differences in the sauna culture and habits exist between vessel types.



### 6.1.5 Length of sea-career

The respondents were asked how long they have worked at sea to analyse if there are any differences on how different amounts of seagoing experience affect the respondents' opinion on the sauna culture on board.

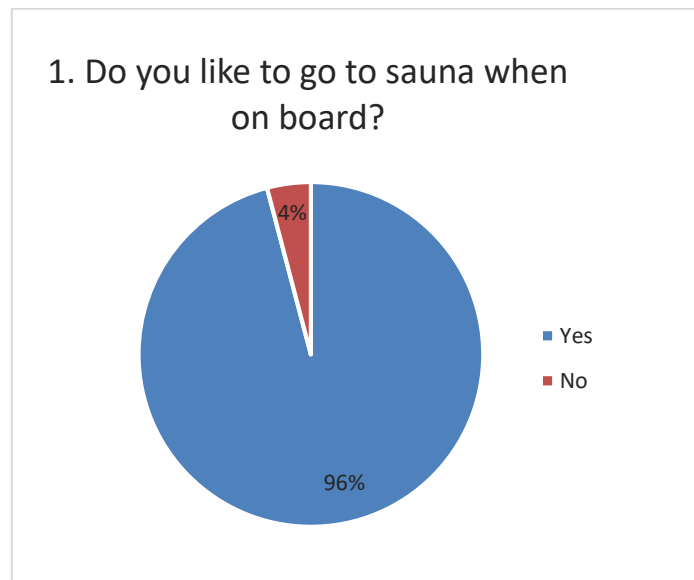
It can be said that all different experience groups in the working life were equally represented, only 6% being the difference between experience groups +10 years and 1-5 years. 92% of the respondents were in the working life with 8% of the respondents being students.



## 6.2 Responses

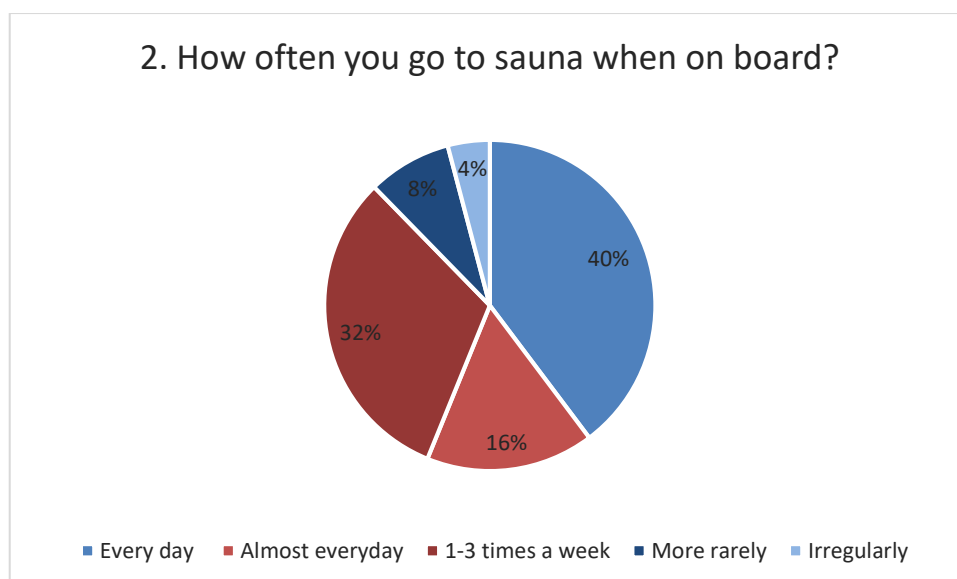
### 6.2.1 Do the seafarers like to go to sauna on board

The first question asked in the survey was whether the seafarer likes to go to sauna on board. The vast majority of the respondents likes to go to sauna when on a ship. All the seafarers who answered no to the question sail on ro-ro vessels.



### 6.2.2 The frequency of sauna use on board

The question on how often the respondents use the sauna facilities on board was an open-ended question to which the respondents gave a written answer. The answers given by the respondents were analysed and organized to five categories to best describe the variety of answers.

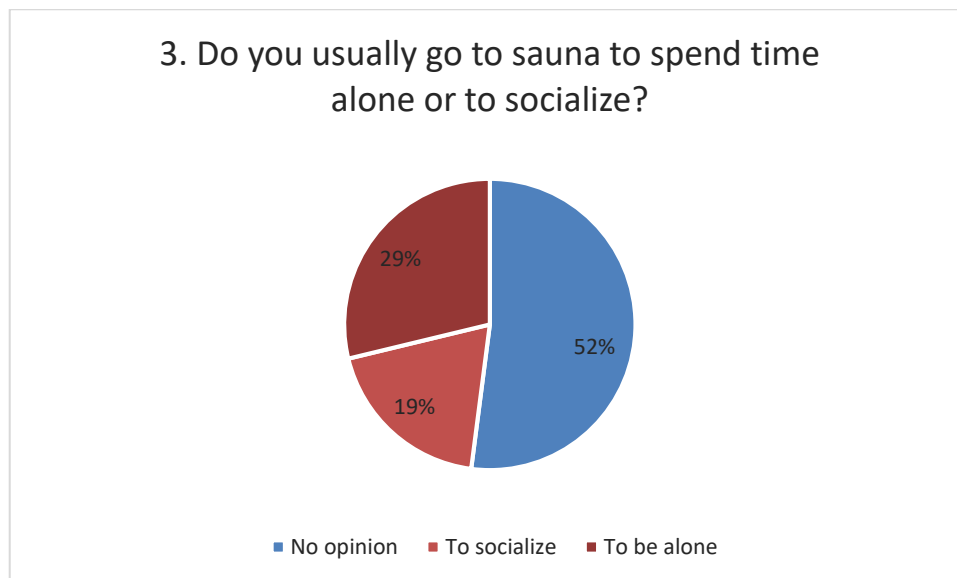




Two answer types were very commonly used; every day and almost every day. 72% of the respondents go to sauna daily or almost daily. The three other categories used for answers are 1 to 3 times a week, more rarely and irregularly. Most respondents were able to give an accurate estimate of how often they use the sauna facilities, but three people (4%) answered that their sauna use varies greatly depending on ship's schedule as an example.

### 6.2.3 Sauna as a social event

Over half of the respondents have no opinion on when it comes to having company in the sauna. Out of the ones who have an opinion, 29% go to sauna to be alone. Out of this 29%, 34% were women. None of the female respondents answered that they go to sauna to socialize – it can be expected that the reason behind this is lower number of women working on board and therefore having less of same sex company on board.

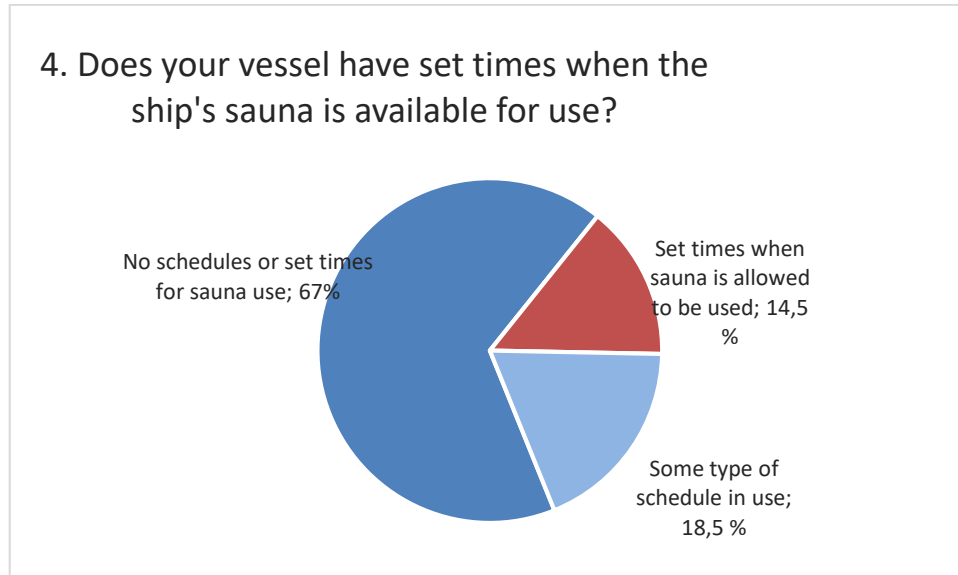


### 6.2.4 Sauna schedules and availability

The seafarers were asked if there is a schedule or other rules concerning the availability of the sauna facilities. There were five different answer options and the respondents were able to choose multiple options as their answer. The different answer options were:

- No schedules or other set times for sauna use
- Set times when sauna is allowed to be used

- Scheduled times for officers & crew
- Scheduled times for men & women
- Other type of schedule



Majority of respondents answered, that there are no scheduling for sauna use when on board. The ones, who answered that there are schedules, work on great variety of different vessels. It was not possible to identify a vessel type that has more scheduling than others. All different vessel types had schedules.

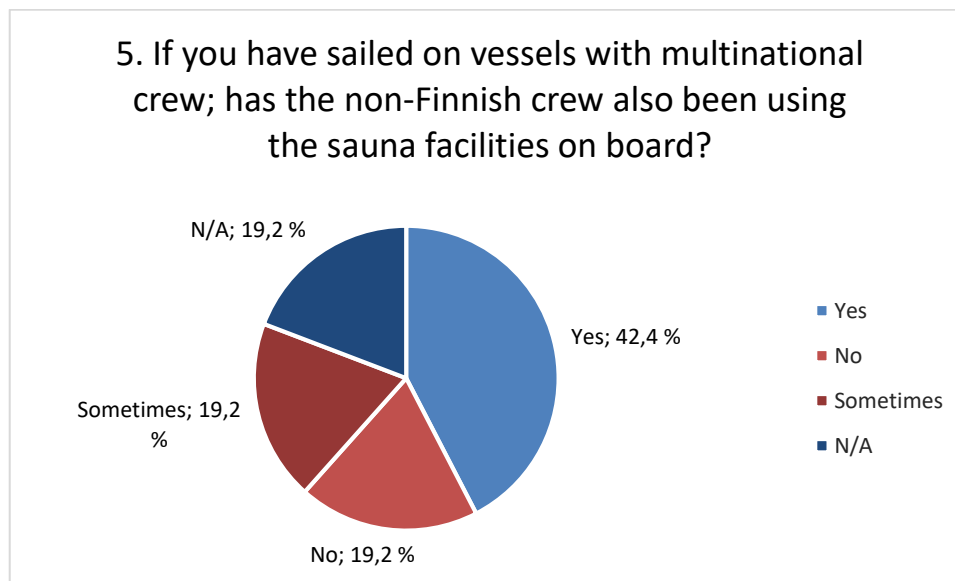
All different vessel types also had set times for sauna use. One respondent used the open space at the end of the questionnaire to mention that on their vessel sauna is on from 15 to 03 and free to use during that period.

None of the respondents answered that their vessel has different sauna turn for officers and crew. This can be a sign that ranks do not anymore play a big role on Finnish vessels while crew is off duty.

#### **6.2.5 Non-Finnish crew and sauna**

The question was an open-ended question where respondents gave a written answer to the question if the non-Finnish crew has used the on board sauna. The given answers were divided into four different categories; Yes, no, sometimes and not applicable. Answers considered not applicable were those in which the respondent mentioned not having sailed

with mixed crew or if the response field had been left blank. Answers that were considered to fit in the sometimes –category were e.g. “mostly Finnish” and “some of them”.



A common theme in the written answers was that Swedish, Russian and Estonian crew use the sauna facilities along with the Finnish crew. Also Italians and Portuguese were mentioned to enjoy sauna.

Non-EU crew were mentioned in nine answers. In three of them was mentioned that non-EU crew uses the sauna and in 6 answers that they do not.

In two answers it was mentioned that even if the non-Finnish crew does not become a regular user of the sauna, they do try it at least once.

Respondents also gave answers in regards of cultural differences. It was mentioned that Russians and Estonians use the shipboard saunas as they have a similar sauna culture, where as non-EU crew can find the sauna culture uncomfortable due to nudity.

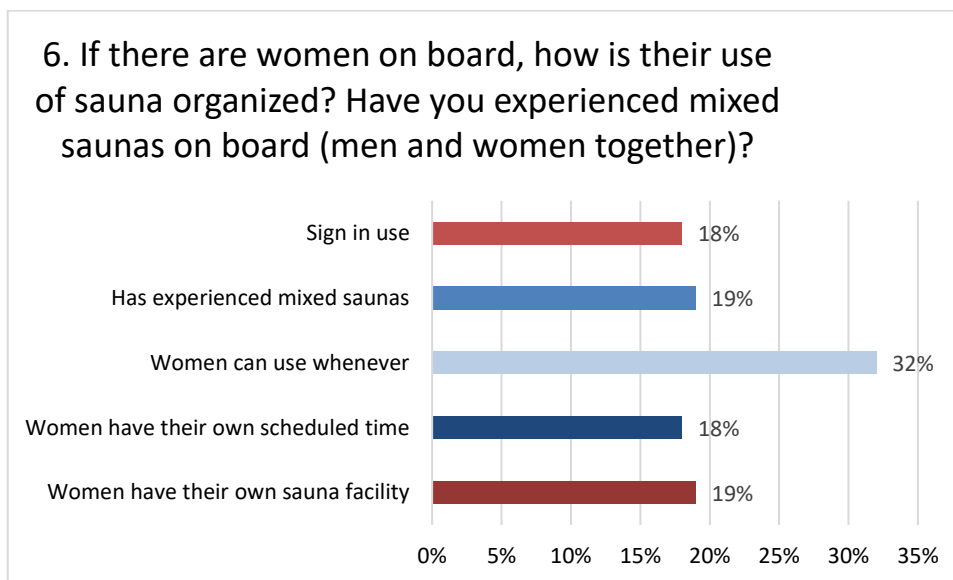
#### **6.2.6 Women on board and the effect on sauna habits**

This question was an open-ended question to which the respondents gave a written answer. Five most common responses were identified.

All the respondents that said that women have their own sauna sail on either tanker or a ro-ro vessel.

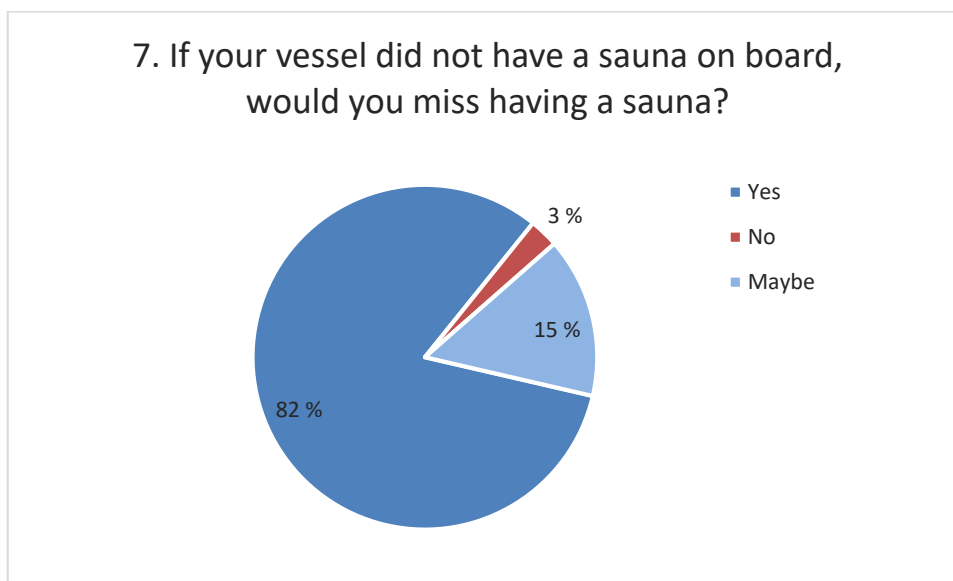
The most common way to organize sauna turns on board is that women simply use the sauna when they want by either posting a sign on the door that the sauna is in use or by reserving the sauna with some other way.

19% of the respondents had experienced mixed saunas on board. According to the responses, mixed saunas occur rather irregularly, there are no scheduled times on board for mixed saunas.



### 6.2.7 Is on-board sauna something that would be missed

This question was a close-ended question with three answer options to choose from; yes, no and maybe.

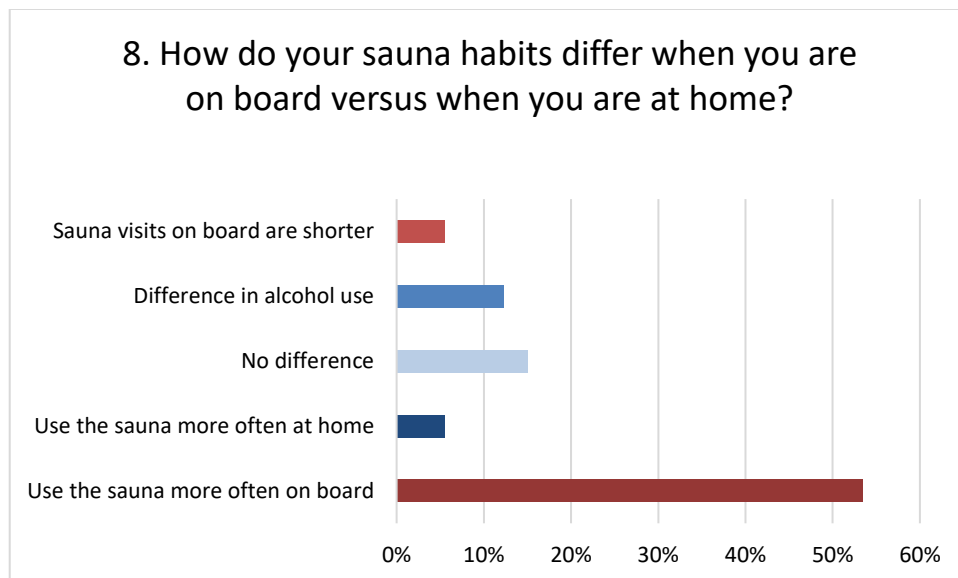


Majority of the respondents think that they would miss having a sauna if they did not have one. 15% were unsure and answered “maybe”, whereas only 3% said that they would not miss sauna.

### 6.2.8 Differences in sauna habits on board versus at home

The question was an open-ended question to which the respondents gave a written answer. From the answers the most common ones are visualised in the graph below. The respondents were free to mention any habits. However, in the question description, examples of different sauna habits were given; how often you use the sauna at home versus on board and is there a difference in the alcohol use. The given examples can have affected the responses.

Half of the respondents, in total 53%, said that they use the sauna more when on board. Only 5% said that they use sauna more at home; these respondents were the ones who also answered that they use the sauna very rarely on board or do not enjoy using the shipboard sauna.



12% mentioned that their alcohol use is different on board and when at home. One respondent said that more alcohol consuming is involved when bathing on board, whereas most respondents said that on board they do not have any alcohol due to the company's zero-tolerance policy in regards to alcohol.

Sauna visits on board are more hectic according to 5% of the responses. Due to limited free time available between work shifts and watches, the sauna visits tend to be much shorter than when at home.

15% said that their sauna habits do not differ from their sauna habits at home.

### **6.2.9 Open comment section**

At the end of the questionnaire, the respondents were allowed to freely give comments on the subject and on their opinion regarding shipboard saunas.

In the responses, following common opinions were identified;

- Sauna is a place to relax
- Sauna is good to have especially after a cold workday outside
- Sauna improves motivation and atmosphere on board
- Sauna is very important to have on board
- Sauna has a positive impact on the mind and body
- Having a sauna on board a Finnish flag ship also part of the Finnish national identity “if there is no sauna, we will build a sauna”

Out of 36 out of 73 respondents had chosen to leave an optional written comment at the end of the survey. Only 2 out of the 36 written comments mentioned that sauna is unimportant.

## **7 Conclusion**

### **7.1 Summary of results**

First shipboard sauna on a Finnish vessel was built over 70 years ago and already in 1976 shipboard sauna became a legal requirement. Nowadays enjoying the shipboard sauna facilities is a daily routine for most Finnish seafarers. 96% of all survey respondents mentioned that they enjoy going to sauna on board and the majority bathes at least every other day, if not every day. This is a strong reflection of the Finnish sauna culture in general - a nationwide custom.

Like in the past when many common jobs ashore were dirty and physical, seafarers mention the importance of on board sauna especially after cold and long days spent on dirty jobs. For the seafarers, sauna's effects on health and wellbeing are important. Sauna is a place to relax and relieve stress in the sometimes-hectic shipboard life.

Sauna on board is not a social event to most seafarers, but the seafarers also do not seek to be alone in the sauna. Whether or not the sauna is a social event or not, it is a culturally bonding element. Introducing non-Finnish crew to sauna can create fellowship and common ground between the nationalities and therefore lessen the effect of multi-national crew as a stressor.

The main users of the sauna facilities are Finnish and other EU crew, but also some non-EU seafarers on Finnish ships have become regular sauna users. Usually the non-EU sailors are introduced to Finnish sauna culture on board and many give it a try, at least once.

Nowadays crew and officers bathe together in the same facilities. In general saunas are free to use according to the individual seafarer's schedule. Women on board sometimes have their own sauna or schedule, but most commonly women use the sauna just as the men do and place a sign outside the sauna in case they do not want to be disturbed. Mixed saunas occur, depending on the individuals, but are not specifically organized on board.

Most of the seafarers who gave a response to the questionnaire bathe more often on board than at home and 82% of all respondents said that they would miss the shipboard sauna if it were to be taken away. There is no difference between the age and experience groups within the seafarers on how they feel about the shipboard saunas. Sauna is important.

## **7.2 Reliability**

Generally speaking the history of sauna is well researched and extensive amount of sources were available. Information on shipboard saunas was difficult to find.

Altogether 76 responses to the questionnaire were gathered. This is a decent amount and the combination of different type of questions provided both qualitative and quantitative data. However it is possible, that the a great deal of responses came from seafarers who felt that the subject of the thesis had value and was important, which could mean that more responses were gathered from those who are active sauna users and enjoy saunas on board.

I believe a better data for this research would have been achieved by conducting shipboard interviews among the crews. Conducting the research as a questionnaire was decided on early in the progress, due to the easy distribution and access to the gathered data.

## **7.3 Recommendations**

On-board saunas are highly valued among seafarers and thanks to existing legislation, not very likely to disappear. However according to my research the history and evolution of shipboard saunas is not well, if at all, documented. The only written sources on shipboard saunas I was able to find were two articles published in the Sauna -magazine in 1989 and 1990. I spoke to many seafarers about the subject of my thesis and especially among the already retired seafarers there are many stories on shipboard saunas that should be documented. There have also been many kinds of interesting solutions on how to build a sauna on board a ship.

My recommendation is to in the future conduct a historical study on the evolution of shipboard saunas and the shipboard sauna culture.



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