

# The role of maritime identity in the economy – the issue of the “cultural code” of Pomorskie Province

## O roli tożsamości morskiej w gospodarce – wokół zagadnienia „kodu kulturowego” Pomorza

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Article history: Received: 29.11.2017 Accepted: 19.07.2018 Published: 22.08.2018

**Abstract:** The article aims to analyze the theme of maritime identity as a cultural code of the Pomerania region. At the same time, it will be proved that this code has had a tangible impact on modern-day economy of the Pomerania region by influencing its dynamics, innovativeness and networking. That influence has been made possible by the post-industrial economy which, as a result of civilizational changes, thrives today mainly thanks to social and cultural factors, also known as social capital, and not just due to infrastructural ones. The resulting maritime identity, which evolved in our region in the interwar period mainly due to the shared experience of building a port in Gdynia and the associated work ethic, has established numerous social bonds and created solidarity among people of the sea. These bonds are gradually expanding the cultural code's sphere of operation with new areas and partners, not necessarily related to the maritime economy. Although these bonds are most evident in Intelligent Specialization no. 1 “Off-shore, port and logistics technologies”, they actually bridge the gap between all intelligent specializations to produce a synergy effect and create innovation. The cultural code brings innovation to traditional (ports, shipyards Baltic-Adriatic Corridor) and sustainable energy-saving “blue growth” maritime economies. Maritime identity is also featured in various forms of tourism, culture and art, while at the same time shaping the teaching programs of maritime schools.

**Keywords:** cultural code, maritime identity, work ethos, social bonds, innovation, synergy, blue economy, Smart Specializations of Pomerania

**Streszczenie:** Celem artykułu jest analiza zagadnienia tożsamości morskiej jako kodu kulturowego Pomorza, a także wykazanie, iż kod ten posiada wymierne znaczenie we współczesnej gospodarce województwa pomorskiego, wpływając na jej dynamikę, innowacyjność i sieciowość. Możliwość tego wpływu wynika z uwarunkowań rozwoju gospodarki postindustrialnej, która na skutek przeobrażeń cywilizacyjnych rozwija się dziś głównie dzięki czynnikom społecznym i kulturowym, określanym też mianem kapitału społecznego, a nie tylko dzięki czynnikom infrastrukturalnym. W efekcie ukształtowana w okresie międzywojennym (głównie na bazie doświadczenia budowy Gdyni w okresie II RP i towarzyszącego mu etosu pracy) tożsamość morska województwa wypracowała liczne więzi społeczne i solidarność ludzi morza, która manifestowała się choćby w trakcie wydarzeń grudniowych lat 70-tych i w ramach ruchu Solidarności. Więzi te mają zarówno charakter wewnętrzny, jak i zewnętrzny. Generują one współczesną gospodarkę Pomorza, skoncentrowaną wokół jej czterech Inteligentnych Specjalizacji i „niebieskiej ekonomii” (blue growth), a także tradycyjnych branż gospodarczych wynikających z położenia geograficznego regionu. Choć w największym stopniu dochodzą one oczywiście do głosu w ramach ISP 1 - Technologie offshore i portowo-logistyczne, w rzeczywistości zapewniają one liczne więzi, które zachodzą pomiędzy wszystkimi inteligentnymi specjalizacjami, dzięki czemu dochodzi do efektu synergii i innowacyjności. Kod morski województwa daje zatem o sobie znać nie tylko w odniesieniu do takich sektorów jak turystyka, kultura, sztuka, szkolnictwo. Morski kod kulturowy wywiera także realny wpływ na innowacyjność i efektywność pomorskiej gospodarki.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kod kulturowy, tożsamość morska, etos pracy, więź społeczna, synergia, innowacyjność, błękitna gospodarka, Inteligentne Specjalizacje Pomorza

The main asset of the Pomorskie Province is its sea-side location which supports the development of industrial branches and sectors linked to cargo handling at seaports, as well as in logistics and restructured ship-building, including off-shore operations. However, our province's relation to the sea has a different, more profound significance in that it has developed a unique "cultural code" – mainly through the historical experience of building a seaport in Gdynia in the interwar period. Of course, we do not wish to detract from the age-old traditions of the port in Gdańsk, at least those related to its operation in the Hanseatic League. These, however, have a different dimension that is not necessarily connected with Poland.

But the construction of Gdynia port was indeed unique as it was achieved by the labor of Polish hands, contributing to economic growth of the entire country through modernization and industrialization. Both its scale and external impact have contributed to Gdynia being labelled an investment of *raison d'état* of the state. These have shaped a strong maritime mythology present in the information and propaganda messages of pre-war Poland [1]. What is maritime identity in modern times? Does it have any practical significance or translate into economic performance? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to understand the role of cultural backgrounds, social bonds and interactions in the contemporary post-industrial economy which they have created.

## THE ROLE OF IDENTITY IN THE ECONOMY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CONTEMPORARY CIVILIZATIONAL CHANGES

Researchers of contemporary civilizational changes underline that the uninterrupted technical progress, which has been on-going in Europe for no less than two centuries, has shifted the basic developmental paradigm from environmental and infrastructural (external) concerns to socio-cultural (internal) ones [2]. The former hierarchical structures dictated by the era of Fordism are being replaced by horizontal structures and increasingly important bottom-up factors.

As a result, the identity issue is becoming a major economic resource of the modern economy. It plays a similar role to that of natural resources (soil, minerals) in the agricultural era or infrastructure resources in the industrial era. Of course, this does not mean that the infrastructure such as, for example, facilities enabling access to sea ports, is of no consequence. Indeed, such a claim would be absurd. What this means, however, is that the material infrastructure itself is not sufficient these days and so it must be enriched to incorporate a socio-cultural approach.

Worthy of mention is also the popular approach of contemporary sociology, in which identity is defined through symbolic interactions, as first postulated by Georg Herbert Mead. In this approach, people's actions rely on meanings which they attribute to things, while meaning itself arises from interactions. According to the Polish sociologist Andrzej Piotrowski, the con-

temporary identity is characterized by "a whole range of issues related to the dynamic organization of the interaction process, and thus the process of identifying oneself and others in the course of interaction by negotiating the identity during situational interactions." [3] At the same time, the authors of interactionism emphasize the outstanding role of the biographical continuity of experience rooted in time, which underlies the identity and interactions created on its basis.

Worthy of mention is also the concept of social capital and trust as well as their role in the economy, as expounded by Francis Fukuyama (and earlier Robert Putnam). According to Fukuyama, social capital differs from other forms of human capital in that "it is created and transmitted through cultural mechanisms: religion, tradition, historical habit." [4] Therefore, "...the accumulation of social capital requires the acceptance of the moral norms of a given community and, in this context, acquiring such features as loyalty, honesty and reliability." [5] Moreover – what is important in regard to Pomorskie province's maritime economy – the essence of mature social capital builds up a bond of trust, but not only with one's own in-group (which is the domain of family-owned businesses); an important role for the American researcher is played by the idea of expanding the circle of trust in more and more areas, with new partners.

## THE MYTHOLOGY OF GDYNIA – WORK ETHOS AND THE BOND BETWEEN PEOPLE OF THE SEA

Which of the above conclusions apply to the Pomorskie Province? Above all, one should emphasize the outstanding significance of the maritime historical heritage of Pomerania related to the role of the port in Gdynia in the history of the Second Polish Republic. This is because it impacts the contemporary maritime economy by providing "a historical habit" (Fukuyama) or "biographical continuity of experience rooted in time" (Piotrowski). It also forms numerous social bonds and interactions within the maritime industry, ensuring mutual trust of sea people based on loyalty, honesty and reliability.

The bond and solidarity of people of the sea were shaped by the work ethos of the inter-war period. Of course, this ethos encompassed the entire society of Gdynia, which built its port and city through blood, sweat and tears. The work was done by local Kashubians who are known to be hard-working [6], as well as migrants from Greater Poland, where positivist traditions had always been strong. For us, however, it is important that the work ethos had been adopted by the people of the sea – fishermen, port workers or seafarers, and – at a later time – Pomeranian shipbuilders. In that way, there developed a special identity and bond between people of the sea, which arose from the nature of their occupations, often performed in difficult conditions, involving struggles with nature (e.g., fishermen, seafarers, but also shipbuilders).

Another conclusion stems from the fact that as a result of the work ethos, people gained experience, work skills and profes-

sional competence, which they could use to accomplish their tasks, and which they later handed down through generations. The institutions of self-regulatory organization – maritime chambers and guilds – as well as secondary and tertiary maritime schools have always safeguarded this expertise and will continue to do so. The bond of the people of the sea also involved contacts with foreign contractors who were located in various corners of the globe because of international trade and transit relations. Thus, the social bond and interactions developed “from a distance”. One should note that the British sociologist Anthony Giddens defines modern globalization as “acting from a distance” [7]. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand that the maritime economy was the first global form of economic activity.

Finally, it is worth noting that the bond between the people of the sea also played a certain political role connected to political transformations of the Eastern Bloc. It demonstrated itself in the dramatic events of December 1970 on the Coast and then in co-founding the multi-million Solidarity, whose cradle lay in the Gdańsk Shipyard and its OHS training hall. All these elements create a unique maritime heritage and form part of the Pomeranian “cultural code”.

## BLUE ECONOMY AND SMART SPECIALIZATIONS OF THE POMORSKIE REGION – CONNECTIONS AND SYNERGIES

Social bonds formed in historical times have survived to the present day and continue to be at the cutting-edge of the Pomeranian maritime economy, while also promoting openness to the world. It is worth noting that the modern maritime economy is based not only on cargo handling at port and shipbuilding services, but also on high-tech, aquaculture, bio-economics and tourism [8]. Thanks to the above-mentioned approach, the maritime economy is becoming sustainable and energy-saving. This is known as “blue growth”. But in the first place, its development requires horizontal social ties and interactions that ensure synergy.

The main tool for implementing the innovation policy of the Pomorskie Province includes four Smart Specializations of Pomerania (ISP) adopted by the Board of Pomorskie Province in April 2015. Importantly, Pomeranian smart specializations were selected in a bottom-up and partnership process in the following areas: ISP 1) off-shore and port-logistics technologies, ISP 2) interactive technologies in an information-rich environment, ISP 3) eco-effective technologies in production, transmission, distribution and consumption of energy and fuels as well as in construction, and ISP 4) medical technologies in the field of civilization diseases and the aging period.

The bottom-up mode of selecting Smart Specializations of the Pomorskie Province also coincides with the apparent direction of contemporary civilizational transformations rewarding freedom of choosing one's own identity as opposed to having that

identity forced on one, as was the case in the past. This determination arose in the past from our region's geographic location and as such was consistent with the marine cultural code of the province. However, nowadays this code is approached differently; it no longer holds a monopolistic position, so diversification is assumed. In that sense, the maritime economy can and should co-exist with other economic businesses.

Even though the first Smart Specialization is dedicated directly to the maritime economy, in reality the maritime “cultural code” ensures mutual communication and exchange of information between the industries forming part of various Smart Specializations, which ensures synergy and a multi-discipline effect. This is related to the fact that the boundaries of individual specializations are blurred. The shipbuilding industry, especially off-shore (building drilling rigs, wind farms, etc.) from 1 ISP connects seamlessly with energy efficiency (ISP 3), involving the acquisition of alternative energy sources. On the other hand, information and communication technologies (ISP 2) are important for the development of logistics (telematics), shipbuilding and power. Bio-economy using marine organisms converges with pharmaceuticals and marine medicine (ISP 4). According to the definition of interaction quoted at the beginning, these contacts not only do not blur the maritime identity but also ennoble it.

One should emphasize that the inter-trade organization is an asset of the Pomeranian economy that draws its strength from searching for technological gaps at the points of contact between various industries. Due to the number of horizontal functional connections between particular types of economies, specific synergy and added value are created, which is a condition for innovation. Diversified foundations of the blue economy also ensure its stability and resistance to economic turmoil which is in turn a consequence of global influences.

Following the network principle, agreements were concluded within individual Smart Specializations. These agreements involve business entities, scientific institutions and business institutions that aim for a given ISP. Pomeranian clusters (including two with a maritime and logistics-transport profile) also operate on the basis of the network logic. These entities interact with other entities, and their interactions involve not only business information but also a cultural code. Thus, this process falls into line with the assumptions of symbolic interactionism described by the scientists and sociologists of contemporary culture. It is defined as a spontaneous bottom-up process that conflicts with the method of administrative coercion. What is needed here is an atmosphere of openness, trust and skills in establishing contacts with the environment.

## CULTURAL CODE OF THE BALTIC-ADRIATIC TRANSPORT CORRIDOR

It is also worth emphasizing that such an understanding of social bonds functions not only within the framework of new technologies and “blue growth” economy. They also occur in

a more traditional maritime economy, integrated around seaports in their deep hinterland. The bonds formed between users of the Baltic-Adriatic Transport Corridor can be an example of such integration. The association of Polish regions of this corridor, established on the initiative of Pomorskie Province in March 2012, is a platform for information exchange between public administration units (regions located in the North-South relationship) and business entities (operators of ports, terminals, airports, ship-owners, etc.). The regions located in the impact zone of the Baltic-Adriatic Transport Corridor are crucial from the perspective of the Polish economy [9].

In line with the principle of symbolic interactionism, external influences are important. In the case of the Baltic-Adriatic Transport Corridor, they translate into commodity import and export streams, dynamically growing for years now, in relations of Poland with other countries of the corridor zone. In the last decade, our trade exchange with South countries has more than doubled. There was also a high increase in trade exchange with the countries of the Baltic Region, which also generated additional transport streams in the Baltic-Adriatic Transport Corridor.

One should also mention that the Baltic-Adriatic Transport Corridor is part of the traditional longitudinal direction of transport routes, having its origins in the Middle Ages or even antiquity (the Amber Road). It developed strongly in the interwar period thanks to an important investment at the time – Śląsk-Porty Coal Rail-Line (Magistrala Węglowa Śląsk-Porty). This investment guaranteed economic sovereignty to Poland, especially during the clash with the German state carrying out its historic mission as part of the so-called *Drang nach Osten*. Hence the element of cultural code of the Baltic-Adriatic Corridor is the historical heritage related to the role of meridional economic connections in the history of Poland.

## THE ROLE OF MARITIME IDENTITY IN TOURISM, CULTURE, ART AND SCHOOLS OF THE POMORSKIE REGION

Maritime identity determines various forms of tourism development in the Pomorskie Region. Requirements in this respect are connected, on the one hand, with the production of appropriate watercraft, some of which are contributed by the Pomeranian shipyards; on the other hand, with the construction of coastal infrastructure: marinas, havens, ferry terminals and accompanying infrastructure (quays, waterfronts, dining facilities and another tourist and recreational infrastructure). Finally, one should not forget about maritime museology – devoted not only to maritime affairs, but also the Museum of the City of Gdynia, European Solidarity Centre or Emigration Museum, since they all promote the unique maritime code of the province. Various forms of cultural and artistic initiatives, such as films, theatre performances and musical compositions relating to marine mythology are also of major importance.

To conclude, one should mention institutions that work for the maritime economy in the Pomorskie Province. Marine person-

nel is educated by Tri-city universities and secondary schools. The most important Pomeranian higher education institutions specializing in maritime studies include the Maritime Academy and the Naval Academy, although maritime faculties are also available at the Gdańsk University of Technology and the University of Gdańsk. Finally, scientific institutes specializing in maritime education, such as: the Ship Design and Research Centre, the Maritime Institute, the Maritime Fisheries Institute and the Institute of Oceanology of the Polish Academy of Sciences play an important role. It is thanks to the latter that it is possible to prepare technologically advanced products that increase innovativeness of the Pomeranian maritime economy. But all in all, these institutions co-create the specific cultural code of the Pomorskie Province.

Eventually, we cannot forget about other, less formal relationships and functional connections between various entities of the maritime economy, business environment institutions, associations and research centers. The very idea of territorial self-government aimed at the Pomorskie Province and the Marshal's Office of the Pomorskie Province appointed by it, is based on the establishment and functioning of countless offices, councils, commissions, task forces, etc. Many connections correspond to the idea of the European Union and are implemented, for example, under the Interreg initiative projects that promote the ideas of “blue growth”, such as: “Let's Communicate” or “Smart Blue Regions”.

Others appear as a part of every business meeting, conference or business trip in which we participate. Valuable interactions are often created accidentally or behind the scenes and on the margins of the main subject but their importance to the economy can be vital. It is difficult not to notice their relation to the interpretation of symbolic interactions as a dynamic process of “negotiating identity” and “mutual interactions” quoted in the beginning.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. With regard to the above considerations, the following final conclusions can be presented:
2. As a result of civilizational changes, the cultural code plays a primary role in the contemporary economy, contributing to the increase of its innovativeness through cultural mechanisms – tradition and “historical habit”.
3. The maritime identity of the Pomorskie Province was formed mainly by the mythology of Gdynia as a city of key importance to the Second Republic of Poland's *raison d'état* and of the accompanying work ethos, which developed a bond between the people of the sea.
4. These bonds as components of the cultural code ensure synergy and innovation of the modern Pomeranian economy based on its four Smart Specializations.

5. The cultural code ensures innovation in both traditional maritime (ports, shipyards, Baltic-Adriatic Corridor) as well as sustainable and energy-saving economies - in line with the "blue growth" model.

6. Maritime identity is also present in various forms of Pomeranian tourism, culture and art, it also determines the curricula of schools specializing in maritime education.

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- [2] The transformations are presented by many analysts of the post-industrial economy, e.g. Daniel Bell, Alain Touraine. An important role is also played by the analyses of: Alvin Toffler, John Naisbitt, Peter Drucker and Jeremi Rifkin. Personally, Bell's position is the closest to my own beliefs. Cf. D. Bell, Ku wielkiej odnowie: religia i kultura w epoce postindustrialnej, [in:] idem: Kulturowe sprzeczności kapitalizmu, Warszawa 1994, p. 182-207.
- [3] A. Piotrowski, Ład interakcji. Studia z socjologii interpretatywnej, Łódź 1998, p. 47. Although the interactive approach belongs, according to Bokszański, to the individual identity (cf. Z. Bokszański, Tożsamości zbiorowe, Warszawa 2007, p. 56), it seems that with its help one can also characterize the collective identity, but internally diversified, within which there are numerous external and internal influences. On the other hand, Ronald Collins writes about 'emotional energy' accompanying interactions cf.: R. Collins, Łańcuchy rytuałów interakcyjnych, Kraków 2011, p. 123-157.
- [4] F. Fukuyama, Zaufanie. Kapitał społeczny a droga do dobrobytu, Warszawa-Wrocław 1997, p. 39.
- [5] Ibidem.
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Word count: 3000 Page count: 5 Tables: – Figures: – References: 9

Scientific Disciplines: Geoscience

DOI: 10.5604/01.3001.0012.2994

Full-text PDF: <https://bullmaritimeinstitute.com/issue/11463>

Cite this article as: Graban M.: The role of maritime identity in the economy – the issue of the "cultural code" of Pomorskie Province: BMI, 2018; 33(1): 1-5

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Competing interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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