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GUIDELINES FOR THE INCLUSION AND ACCESS OF WOMEN WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES IN SAILING



WomenforSea
Feel Learn Act





01

Introduction

These guidelines are based on the experience of Mujeres In Mare a women-centered sailing community rooted in the principles of social sailing, feminist pedagogy, and environmental awareness. It was created as a collective space where women from different backgrounds can access the sea as a shared environment for learning, empowerment, and transformation. Since its foundation the community promoted several projects and initiatives that led to the first Erasmus+ project “SeaSters: Promoting the access and inclusion of women in Sailing”. The project has been promoted by the association Rizomi. Lab (IT), the fiscal sponsor of Mujeres in Mare community, Ponentino ASD (IT), Les Canouberies (FR), Women for Sea (FR) and Die Seglerinnen (D). The project allowed a deep and extensive exchange of best practices that enriched the methodologies of the social sailing and sea pedagogy practices with an intersectional perspectives.

02

The practice of Social Sailing

Social sailing is a collective and community-oriented way of navigating the sea that combines sailing, social engagement, cultural exchange, and political awareness. It reimagines the boat not as a private or exclusive space, but as a shared platform for encounter, solidarity, learning, and collective action. It's a way to practice the sport of sailing in a meaningful way and facilitating the participation of people with fewer opportunities. In this context, navigation cannot be separated from questions of responsibility, solidarity, and justice. Life on boat requires cooperation, care, communication, and mutual trust. Decisions are made collectively, responsibilities are shared, and knowledge is exchanged horizontally among participants. In this sense, the boat becomes a small-scale experiment in alternative forms of social organization, where collaboration and interdependence replace competition and hierarchy.

03

A feminist approach to sea pedagogy

Sea pedagogy is an experiential educational methodology that uses the marine environment as a living classroom where learning emerges through direct experience, embodied knowledge, and collective practice. It is based on the idea that the sea is not only a physical space, but also a relational, symbolic, and transformative environment capable of activating deep processes of personal growth, social learning, and emotional reconfiguration.

The sea pedagogy is a transformative practice that integrates education, personal development, and social change. It creates conditions in which individuals can experiment sailing as an inclusive pathway. A feminist approach to sea pedagogy reimagines the marine environment as an educational and political space where learning, empowerment, and care are inseparable and fundamental elements to increase women access and inclusion in sailing. At the core of this approach is the recognition that access to the sea has historically been shaped by gendered inequalities, economic privilege, and cultural exclusion.

A feminist sea pedagogy actively challenges these structures by opening nautical spaces to women and marginalized groups, particularly those who have been excluded from sports, leadership roles, or public spaces of decision-making. Care is a central pedagogical principle.

A feminist approach recognizes care not as a secondary or private activity, but as a fundamental educational practice. Caring for oneself, for others, for the group dynamics, and for the marine environment becomes part of the learning process. This includes attention to emotional states, safety, communication, and mutual support, creating conditions in which participants can engage without fear of judgment or exclusion.

A feminist approach to sea pedagogy is not only an educational method, but also a transformative practice that reshapes relationships, identities, and power structures—both on board and beyond.

04

Shared Leadership

Shared leadership is a central principle in a feminist approach to sea pedagogy, as it redefines how authority, responsibility, and decision-making are distributed within the learning environment on board. Rather than concentrating leadership in a single figure of command, shared leadership is based on the continuous circulation of roles, competences, and decision-making processes among all participants. This approach challenges traditional maritime hierarchies, which often reflect broader gendered and social power imbalances, and replaces them with more participatory, collaborative, and flexible forms of organization.

A crucial methodological dimension of shared leadership is the intentional work of deconstructing the “natural” hierarchies on which maritime environment is based. On board, informal hierarchies can quickly develop based on technical expertise, physical strength, sailing experience, or communicative dominance. These dynamics, if left unexamined, risk reproducing exclusion, silencing less experienced participants, and reinforcing existing inequalities. A feminist sea pedagogy actively addresses these processes by making them visible, fostering critical reflection, and introducing practices that prevent hierarchy from becoming fixed or oppressive.

Within this framework, leadership is understood as a dynamic and situational function rather than a permanent status. Different participants may take the lead depending on the task, context, or specific competence required, while remaining equally valued within the group. This fluidity encourages mutual learning, increases collective awareness, and strengthens the sense of shared responsibility for both navigation and group wellbeing.

At the same time, shared leadership is closely connected to an ethics of care that is fundamental to feminist pedagogy. Decisions are not based solely on efficiency or performance, but also on attentiveness to emotional states, group dynamics, and individual needs. This integration of care and leadership fosters safer, more inclusive, and more resilient learning environments.

In this sense, shared leadership at sea becomes both a practical organizational model and a transformative educational practice, capable of reshaping relationships, redistributing power, and fostering more equitable and cooperative forms of collective action on board and beyond.

05

Women-only navigation

Women-only navigation experiences plays a crucial role in fostering autonomy, empowerment, and self-confidence among participants, particularly for women with fewer opportunities or those who have experienced trauma, discrimination, or gender-based violence. A women-only environment creates a safer and less judgmental space in which participants feel more comfortable expressing themselves, taking initiative, and experimenting with new roles and responsibilities.

Within an all-female crew, traditional gender stereotypes related to leadership, technical competences, physical ability, and decision-making can be challenged and transformed. Women are encouraged to actively participate in navigation tasks, problem-solving processes, and collective decision-making, developing a stronger sense of agency and personal efficacy.

The experience of managing a boat together, facing environmental conditions, and cooperating at sea can strengthen mutual trust, solidarity, and emotional support among participants. This shared experience often contributes to the development of resilience and a renewed perception of one's own capabilities.

For women experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), women-only settings may also reduce anxiety and hypervigilance, facilitating emotional regulation and a greater sense of psychological safety. Feeling protected from external judgment or gender-based power dynamics can support participants in gradually rebuilding confidence in themselves, in others, and in their ability to navigate unfamiliar situations.

Ultimately, women-only sea pedagogy programmes can become transformative spaces where participants not only acquire nautical and social skills, but also rediscover their voice, autonomy, and confidence in their own potential.



06

Set and settings

Set and setting are essential methodological dimensions in promoting women's access and inclusion in sailing, particularly within a sea pedagogy framework oriented toward empowerment and social justice. The concept of set refers to the internal conditions that participants bring into the experience—such as emotional state, expectations, past experiences, confidence levels, and potential trauma histories—while setting refers to the external environment, including the physical, social, and relational context in which the sailing experience takes place. Both dimensions must be intentionally designed and continuously monitored to ensure safety, inclusion, and meaningful participation.

From a feminist and trauma-informed perspective, careful attention to set means recognizing that many women approaching sailing for the first time may carry experiences of exclusion, fear of failure, or gender-based discrimination that can influence their sense of belonging. Preparing the set therefore involves creating gradual pathways of engagement, offering psychological safety, fostering trust, and validating diverse emotional responses without judgment.

Participants should be supported in entering the experience at their own pace, with space for uncertainty, learning, and self-expression.

Equally important is the intentional design of the setting. In sailing contexts, the setting includes not only the boat and physical environment, but also the social organization on board, communication styles, leadership structures, and group dynamics. A feminist approach ensures that the setting actively counters exclusionary or hierarchical patterns by promoting shared leadership, role rotation, inclusive communication, and care-based relationships. The setting must be physically safe, emotionally supportive, and culturally sensitive, allowing women to feel both protected and empowered.

When set and setting are aligned, sailing becomes more than a technical or recreational activity; it becomes a transformative learning environment where women can develop confidence, autonomy, and collective agency. The sea, in this sense, is not only a space of navigation but also a pedagogical and relational ecosystem in which internal states and external structures interact to produce conditions for inclusion, healing, and empowerment.

07

Social Follow-up on land

Social follow-up after navigation is a crucial component of feminist sea pedagogy, ensuring that the transformative experience at sea continues and stabilises once participants return to land. The follow-up process acts as a bridge between the maritime experience and everyday life, supporting the consolidation of skills, confidence, and social bonds developed during sailing activities. The land-based follow-up also strengthens community building by maintaining relational connections beyond the boat. Informal gatherings and ongoing group activities help sustain trust, solidarity, and peer support, preventing isolation and reinforcing the sense of belonging to a collective. This continuity is particularly where empowerment is understood as a relational and ongoing process. In addition, structured follow-up activities support the transfer of skills and confidence into everyday contexts, including work, education, and social participation. By linking sea-based learning with real-life trajectories, participants are better able to recognise their own capacities, set new goals, and sustain long-term personal and professional development.

08

Collective Boat Ownership: the case of Seasters coop

Collective boat ownership, represents a best practice for promoting access, inclusion, and sustainability in women-led sailing initiatives. Seasters, is a women cooperative counting at the moment 32 members. The cooperative practices the collective property of two boats with a no-fixed-cost model. The only fixed costs is the initial membership fee (300 Euro). The members organize their navigation contributing with a daily fee. In this way it is possible to include in the cooperative women that have less economic resource and/or less time to sail and have an occasional use of the boat. In this framework, boats are not treated as private assets or commercial rental tools, but as shared commons owned and managed collectively by a group of women organized in a cooperative structure. This approach fundamentally redefines the economic and symbolic relationship to sailing, shifting it from an individualistic and high-cost activity to a shared, accessible, and community-oriented practice.

At the core of this model are the principles of shared responsibility for ownership and community sailing.

This not only reduces individual financial burden but also fosters a strong sense of belonging and accountability toward the vessel and the community that uses it. The boat becomes a living space of cooperation rather than a service consumed individually.

Moreover members are directly involved in the full lifecycle of the boat—navigation, maintenance, logistics, and organisational planning—developing both technical and managerial competences. This integrated involvement strengthens autonomy, confidence, and leadership skills, particularly for women who may not have previously had access to maritime or technical environments.

The priority of the boat usage is given to social projects and collective navigations rather than individual and private sailing. The projects are developed in cooperation with no-profit organizations, often in the framework of funded initiatives and this contributes to the sustainability of the cooperative.

The Seasters-inspired model also carries a strong feminist, social and political dimension. Ownership becomes an act of empowerment and visibility, redefining who has the right to access, use, and shape maritime spaces.

In this sense, it is not only an operational model, but also a transformative practice that integrates economic solidarity, feminist principles, and social innovation within the maritime sector.

09

Boosting the access: the case of Sea Passport

The Sea Passport initiative, developed by the network Marseille Vue de la Mer, is a social inclusion programme designed to democratise access to the sea and maritime activities for residents of Marseille, particularly those who are usually excluded due to economic, social, or cultural barriers.

The initiative operates as a “maritime access passport” that gives participants a personal credit (approximately €200) valid for one year, which can be used to access a wide range of sea-based and coastal activities such as sailing, kayaking, snorkeling, coastal walks, fishing experiences, and environmental or cultural workshops linked to the Mediterranean ecosystem.

Beyond its financial mechanism, the Sea Passport is structured as a participatory ecosystem of inclusion. Participants join a broader community of associations, sailing clubs, professionals, and volunteers who collectively offer activities and learning experiences.

The system connects users to a network of maritime actors, enabling access not only to recreational sailing but also to educational pathways, skill development, and potential vocational orientation in maritime fields.

A key innovation of the initiative is its solidarity-based credit system, which can be used fully or partially depending on the participant's social and economic situation. This allows some users to access activities for free or at reduced cost, while others contribute financially, reinforcing a redistributive logic that supports inclusion and equal access to the sea.

The Sea Passport also functions as a pedagogical and community-building tool. It encourages participants to progressively discover the maritime environment, meet other residents, and engage with local maritime culture. Activities are designed as opportunities for learning, environmental awareness, and social connection, fostering a sense of belonging to the Mediterranean space.

The Marseille Vue de la Mer Sea Passport is both a practical access instrument and a social innovation model, combining solidarity financing, network-based governance, and experiential maritime education. Its broader aim is to transform the sea from an exclusive or distant resource into a shared, accessible, and collective public space.

10

Multi-Actor networks in inclusive sailing

The institutional structure of inclusive sailing initiatives is fundamental to ensuring accessibility, sustainability, and long-term social impact in women's participation in maritime activities. The barriers that prevent many women from accessing sailing are often multidimensional, involving economic inequality, social exclusion, gender stereotypes, lack of confidence, limited educational opportunities, and psychological vulnerability. For this reason, no single organisation can effectively respond to all these challenges alone. Building strong and coordinated multi-actor networks is therefore essential for creating truly inclusive and transformative sailing programmes.

An effective ecosystem for inclusive sailing should involve a diverse range of stakeholders, including NGOs, yacht clubs, sailing schools, public institutions, educational organisations, social enterprises, feminist associations, and local communities. Each actor contributes complementary knowledge, resources, and competences that strengthen the overall impact of the initiative.

When these actors collaborate within a shared vision, inclusive sailing becomes not simply an isolated activity but a collective social responsibility and a long-term community investment. Network-based cooperation allows resources, infrastructures, and expertise to be shared more efficiently, reducing economic and structural barriers to participation. Through partnerships, organisations can develop scholarship systems, subsidised access schemes, shared use of boats and marinas, transportation support, and integrated social services, making sailing significantly more accessible for women with fewer opportunities. In this sense, the development of institutional networks is not only an operational strategy, but also a political and pedagogical process that redistributes access to maritime culture and promotes more equitable, participatory, and socially engaged forms of sailing.



SeaSters: Promoting the access and inclusion of women in Sailing

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