

THE WATERLINE

IT COULD BE HEAVEN, IT COULD BE HELL.



*"If people knew how hard I had to work to achieve my mastery,
it wouldn't seem so wonderful."*

- Michelangelo



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Logline

From the most dangerous jobs and remote places to the luxury decks of giant cruise ships, chasing a desire called happiness.

Subject

A giant floating vacation resort, the cruise ship, is under construction and will soon be ready to ply international waters. Along the supply chain, between the extraction of raw materials to the decommissioning of the now obsolete ships, workers, vacationers and families live and work, floating on the line between striving to survive, dreaming and escaping from everyday life.



Concept Teaser

Content assembled from various sources in order to illustrate the concept

<https://vimeo.com/primipiani/wlctb>

Research Footage

Original content shot during the research phase

<https://vimeo.com/primipiani/wlrmeng>

Format

- ▶ Documentary (feature)
- ▶ Social Impact Strategy

Status

Research and Development

Short Synopsis

In the Sahara desert of Mauritania, a man returns from an illegal gold dig with a small treasure that he carefully guards. He returns toward the coast, where he lives with his elderly mother. He boards a two-kilometer-long freight train carrying iron ore and begins a sixteen-hour journey between the stifling heat of the day and the night frost. Wrapped in abundant *challe*, he helps those who have to throw supplies and running animals into the villages that this rail line nurtures between sea and hinterland. He drinks tea and finds peace in a moment of prayer. After an exhausting journey, the man arrives in Nouadhibou, by the sea. At home his mother awaits him. Meanwhile, modern, endless rollers transport iron ore from train cars to cargo ships docked a few hundred meters from the village. A cluster of men spread their mats on the seashore and turn the other way, in the direction of Mecca. The imam chants, while behind them stretches a sprawling graveyard of rusting carcasses of abandoned cargo ships beneath the shoreline. In the distance, two cargo ships cross each other in navigation.

In Monfalcone, Italy, fleets of dark-skinned workers invade the streets of the town on bicycles at dawn. The shipyard has three ships under construction, and the parking lot at the main entrance plaza quickly fills with thousands of bicycles. To the side, the skeleton of a cruise ship under construction and the sparks of some welders popping up among the huge sheets of metal. A worker dreams of going on a cruise and suffers from not being allowed to participate in the various of the ships he builds. He is betrothed to a young Bangladeshi woman and, as is the practice, will be married a first time from home with the imam during a video call with his future wife, in the presence of a few friends and her family members in Bangladesh. The streets of Monfalcone are populated by black men and women wearing colourful saris and sometimes burkas, amid the distrust of the Italians left in the village. Bicycle stores, barbershops, tailors, bars and a few restaurants are Bengali, and foreign communities, attracted by factory work, make up about a third of the townspeople.



In international waters off the Caribbean, two widows and longtime friends begin the exploration of luxury and entertainment on the first cruise of their lives.

They have left behind the growing pains of everyday independence and now enjoy the service and amenities on offer. They have a front row seat for the fireworks displays with acrobats and laser shows, they don't say no to cocktails, and one of them allows herself a few flirtatious exchanges with the crew.

The two women enjoy the experience with complicity, but from time to time something seems to upset them.

At night, while the ship is sailing, in a moment of greater intimacy, one wonders why she waited so long to indulge in this gift. The other is uneasy when she thinks about her daily autonomy and wonders where all these people, the crew, their families come from and then wonders about the mammoth size of the ship, how much it weighs and how it floats...

In the Gulf of Chattogram, Bangladesh, a cruise ship is launched toward the beach. Waiting for it, blowtorch in hand, is a young boy. Behind him a cluster of peers dressed in blue uniforms go to school. One of them is holding a ball. The little boy watches the ship beached and approaches the shore.

The little boy's mother works at the waste materials recovery center along the dusty, chaotic main street of the

small town. Beside her, her youngest son tries to take his first steps and handles discarded pieces of rope.

When they are home together, the three live a life of habitual gestures and silences. The little boy dreams of being discovered by a scout and becoming a famous soccer player, but at the same time he is a small, fast-growing man who risks his life every day at the ship-breaking factory and brings home a paycheck that allows all three to survive.

The mother now dreams only of seeing her older son come home at night.

On his day off, the little boy walks to the Patenga Sea beach, a place populated by tourists who come from the hinterland dressed up on weekends, and wades knee-deep in water into a surreal atmosphere among a hundred men with smartphones in hand, intent on finding the best pose for a selfie or talking to someone and being seen on the beach.

Somewhere in the world, a few go-karts whiz silently by with electric motors on a three-story track on the deck of a cruise ship crossing a channel between sloping fjords and emerald green forests.



Narrative Path

The project follows the production chain of a cruise ship, focusing on workers and cruise passengers, exploring desires between present and future. It develops in four crucial phases:

- Iron mining/transportation: from Zouerat, Mauritania, along a two-kilometer train to Nouadhibou, West African coast.
- Construction: made by workers at the construction site in Monfalcone, Italy.
- Cruising: passengers on a route in the waters of the Americas.
- Ship dismantling: in Chattogram, Bangladesh, with workers handling the dismantling and sorting of components.



Visual Approach

A long serpentine journey through a network of infrastructure, industries, and communities. From a ship's genesis to its death, men, women, and children witness the lives of these ships in a journey that spans sea and land.

he pace of the narrative is a reflection of life: slow and relentless as a ship's navigation or its production, hectic as markets and villages, and then suspended, as in moments of recollection in prayer and long voyages.

The environments converse with the characters, amplifying their emotions.

The film is interested in the dignity of the human being, regardless of the joy or toil of everyday life, rather than making judgments or considerations on the merits of personal choices or individual paths.

This pursuit is influenced by, among others, the intimacies and poetry of the late Glawogger, the cruising episodes of David Foster Wallace and Corina Schwingruber, and the learned stories of men, women, and children living along the line.

The characters' dreams and their very different lives create a juxtaposition of frames, a contrast between worlds, situations and cultures, money, poverty and security.

The protagonist is humanity - in search of happiness, a dream or an illusion. Its nature is expressed by the events in the lives of workers and cruise passengers. Of their routines and novelties, their silences and buoys, and fate's own sense of irony.



Authors Note

We both live in Trieste, a small seaside town that has been welcoming cruise ships to its downtown docks for decades. One day, in front of one of these floating cathedrals, we noticed two white dots on a tiny raft.

They were hand-cleaning, with a broom, the massive stern of the ship, while a 90s disco super hit resounded from the main deck. At that moment, thoughts went out to all those invisible hands, the real driving force hidden behind the financial, human and environmental effort required to bring this glittering business to life.

It made us reflect on ourselves, on when we look for happiness on the outside and in the recognition of others. About the exhausting races made to achieve something, to reach a goal that, after a brief flicker of joy, often then left us with only a doubt: "Are we looking for happiness in the right place?"

Very often we have felt lost in the face of the pressures of our social system, a structure that leads us to chase a better future that from time to time moves a little further and grants the right to be safe only to those who can buy it. But where is it that others seek happiness? And if it works for them, what is it that we fail to see?

We love movies, their ability to unleash minds and give voice to those who have none. They push us out of our comfort zone and evolve us as human beings. We have been traveling as privileged citizens and storytellers for some time now, asking the meaning of happiness from the people we meet along the way, wherever they come from or are headed.

The cruise ship is a metaphor for our society, a spectacular floating mirror capable of reflecting many of the fundamental issues of the times in which we live.

It is a place where we can take a deep look at ourselves, both as individual human beings and as a community, reflecting on our innermost priorities and the responsibilities of the choices we make. The course is set and the ship sails the seas, but are we looking for happiness in the right direction?

Chronology

The project originates from experiences in Iraqi Kurdistan with the NGO "Un Ponte Per" between 2016 and 2019. It continues to evolve in Turkey in 2018 with Christopher Thomson. Sabina Krešić of Fade In offers advice.

Collaboration with AMI on inclusion projects with local Bengali communities begins in 2020.

ESoDoc selects Aurora Mischi in 2021 to structure the project and implement The Waterline's impact strategy. There are expressions of interest from potential co-producers and impact producers during ESoDoc 2021.

Start collaboration with a tour operator in Trieste to access an MSC cruise in the Mediterranean and meet the workers on board.

Mediterranean Cruise. The reality of a cruise during the COVID period is very different from the American Caribbean routes we are interested in, but the different reality lent itself to the search for the same elements: that set of efforts, crafts and entertainment that suggest one solution: the show must go on!

Collaboration with the NGO Shipbreaking Platform began in the same year, a consortium of more than 20 organizations fighting labor rights violations in the shipbreaking industry.

Collaboration begins with Roger Short, a cooperation and development expert on labor rights and water management in developing areas (ILO and IMO).

In 2022, a partnership is established with IndustryALL, an international union focused on workers' rights, specifically with the director of Shipbuilding and ship-breaking, with offices in Geneva, Bangladesh, and Mauritania. IndustriALL Global Union represents 50 million workers in more than 140 countries, working globally in the mining, energy and manufacturing sectors.

In Rotterdam, Aurora Mischi participates in the Ship Recycling Lab on Sustainability, Workers' Rights and the Circular Economy. Made contact with European Commission, Circular Economy Directorate and Directorate for Environmental Governance, Sustainability and Global Policies, both responsible for formulating the new Ship Recycling Regulation for the EU Parliament scheduled for 2025.

Among NGOs, with Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), The Ocean Opportunity Lab (TOOL). Among companies, with Sea2Cradle, ArcelorMittal, Circular Maritime Technologies (CMT) International BV, Leviathan GmbH, EPEA GmbH, and with Lüneburg University.



Social Impact Strategy

The cruise ship industry represents a complex amalgam of resource exploitation and labor, with significant economic gain and pre-packaged mass entertainment offerings. Tourist demand is high and attractive to many, but the supply chain is often seen as risky and expensive.

In the production chain, there are many grey areas.

Low-income workers remain under the radar, while entertainment is the most visible aspect.

Before the ship hits the water, an army of workers must mine, ship and assemble materials, involving enormous financial, material, environmental and human resources. The workers, though with dreams, face a daily struggle for survival and have limited access to basic rights.

In an environmental scenario with negative predictions, it becomes necessary to at least ask about necessity and impact, without forgetting the people along the way.

We have partnered with the NGO Shipbreaking Platform and involved IndustriALL Global Union.

We now aim to collaborate with other organizations and stakeholders in cruise ship production and protection of working and environmental conditions.

We want to deepen our knowledge on this complex issue and gain logistical support, access to information and sector expertise.

Given the growing global concerns and the key role of the Ship Recycling Regulation in the European Parliament, we want to engage those who are already interested in these issues. We also want to raise awareness among new audiences, forming an active community that can promote change and engage a wider audience.

Target

- **Grassroots Awareness:** supporting targeted groups through Call-to-Action campaigns and creating a new community, to facilitate and accelerate the transition to green energy.
- **Companies and investors:** support forward-looking companies that invest in the transition to green energy and promote circular economy models.
- **Advocacy:** support advocacy practices and legislators.

Output and Distribution

- **Visibility short film:** public and decision-making arenas.
- **Multimedia content** (video, photos, literature) for web and print.
- **Call-to-Action** support (crowd-funding, fundraising) to raise funds for families of workers victims of labor violations.
- **Web distribution:** monitored and measured in favor of the project and its stakeholders.

The project supports five of the UN SDGs 2030 promoted and supported by the European Community (8, 9, 12, 13, 14).

United Nations SDGs

Promote good practices for some of the 17 Goals that UN member states developed in 2015.

They provide a shared agenda for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and in the future.



Collaborations

Staragara (Producer)

Documentary production company, Italy/Slovenia.

Fade In Productions (Co-producer)

Documentary production company, Croatia.

ESoDoc

EU Media Program training for social documentary and impact strategies.

NGO Shipbreaking Platform

Global coalition of organizations working to reverse the environmental damage and human rights violations caused by current shipbreaking practices.

IndustriALL

IndustriALL Global Union represents more than 50 million workers in more than 140 countries, operating globally along supply chains in the mining, energy and manufacturing sectors.

A.M.I.

Nonprofit organization on human rights and inclusion issues, Italy.

Massimo Mucchiut*Director, Camera*

Assists Žilnik in his early years.
He has worked in the Middle East, Balkans, South America, Asia and Europe producing multimedia content for NGOs, independent media and brands.

Aurora Mischi*Director, Creative Producer*

She is an independent creative producer trained in the for-profit world and has coordinated entrepreneurial, scientific and artistic projects. She has been selected for the 2021 edition of ESoDoc.

Fifteen years ago we met and have been working together for six. We have honed our skills, cultivated a strong friendship.

After starting with NGOs, telling stories from different parts of the world, we traveled to conflict zones, remote villages and metropolises in Europe, Asia, South America and the Middle East.

Over time, we chose creative independence, becoming co-authors of a project based on individual visions now shared. Our similar and different sensibilities are seamlessly integrated into a unified point of view. Every aspect of the project is discussed and communicated with one voice.

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