



SAFEGUARDING THE WORLD'S UNDERWATER CULTURAL HERITAGE

Scientific Conference on the Occasion of the Centenary of World War I

26-27 June 2014, Bruges, Belgium

Recommendations

The First World War left behind thousands of submerged heritage sites that today, a hundred years later, are precious heritage falling under the scope of the UNESCO 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage. Facing pressures ranging from salvage, trawling and apathy, this submerged heritage of the war is a powerful but threatened reminder not only of that conflict, but also of its consequences. It needs care, preservation and awareness to fully assume its function as witness of history and means of education.

From 26 to 27 June, on the occasion of the Centenary of World War I, scientists, diplomats and legal experts from 36 countries came together to discuss the preservation, research and protection of World War I underwater cultural heritage. In a common resolve and in their function as experts:

Commemorating the Centenary of World War I and its devastating impact;

Acknowledging the historical impact of the Naval War of World War I and the trans-national importance of its rich submerged heritage for science, education, and reconciliation, but also recreation, cultural tourism, and as a refuge for marine and avian life;

Underlining the significance of underwater cultural heritage sites as a tangible link to historic events, and a chance for the current and future generations to ponder war's consequences and to learn from this heritage legacy in order to make positive changes in how we conduct ourselves today or in future;

Recognizing the scope of, but also the threats to underwater cultural heritage resulting from World War I, such as salvage, trawling, metal recovery and indifference as well as the difficulties of the conservation and preservation of large scale metal wrecks;

Underlining the challenges of the legal protection of the underwater cultural heritage from World War I and especially the interest of the ratification of the UNESCO 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage for the safeguarding of this heritage;

Underlining the need to raise public awareness of underwater cultural heritage;

Giving thought also to the need to pay attention to the underwater cultural heritage from World War II;

Underlining the need to recognize many of the wrecks of WWI as maritime war graves;

The participants of the Conference:

1. *Encourage* all States to ratify and fully implement the UNESCO 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage;
2. *Encourage* all States not yet party to the Convention to recognize and apply the principles of the Convention and the Rules of its Annex;
3. *Encourage* States to adopt an appropriate national legal framework to protect underwater cultural heritage;
4. *Encourage* the further development of the Operational Guidelines of the Convention to support its implementation and to consider the manner in which the suite of the UNESCO Cultural Heritage Conventions may also be used to protect the underwater cultural heritage of World War I;
5. *Recall* to States Parties to the 2001 Convention their obligation to create competent national authorities according to Art. 22, but also encouraging non-State-Parties to create such authorities;
6. *Encourage* national authorities to cooperate on a national level to protect underwater WWI heritage, in particular calling on the customs services, police and navies to control the introduction of artifacts from the sea into the countries;
7. *Encourage* States to foster the monitoring and mapping of WWI underwater cultural heritage in order to allow for its research, protection and monitoring, but also to be able to evaluate environmental threats potentially emanating from some of the World War I wreck sites;
8. *Encourage* cooperation among scientists to allow the full inventurisation and mapping of all underwater cultural heritage from World War I and to *encourage* the creation of an international database with WWI underwater cultural heritage and to include in the database and through diver networks data, criteria and methodologies to evaluate the conservation state of metallic shipwrecks and to evaluate priority and the technical feasibility of their protection.
9. *Invite* States and all other relevant stakeholders to take urgent action to foster the preservation and conservation of World War I wrecks;

10. Encourages cooperation among divers and scientists to assess and monitor all human and natural impacts on underwater cultural heritage, including corrosion and climate change, in order to evaluate and anticipate the degradation of this heritage;
11. Strongly encourage to share information and allow responsible access to submerged heritage from World War I, be it in situ, in museums, on the web or virtually, for the public and with the use of innovative technologies;
12. Encourage the creation of Marine Protected Areas and Maritime Landscapes, linking cultural heritage with natural heritage, and to create where appropriate dive trails or other access possibilities;
13. Encourage the creation of cultural routes connecting inland, coastal and underwater cultural heritage at regional or international level.
14. Encourage projects to involve and educate the public and raise the perceived significance of underwater cultural heritage.
15. Encourage utilizing projects, such as the UNESCO Education Initiative on WWI Underwater Cultural Heritage, the “Lost beneath the Waves” Project of the Nautical Archaeology Society, UK, and the A2S Project of the Maritime Archaeology Trust, UK, amongst others, to create a best practice framework for dissemination and public engagement;
16. Encourage investment in museums and virtualizing projects focusing on WWI UCH and to associate it with the human stories;
17. Encourage collective and individual events and the delivery of a high profile WWI wreck project to recognize the loss of life across the globe and sensitize the public and to create a network for that purpose;
18. Encourage a common resolve and ethos in the projects on WWI UCH, especially reflecting on the peace and reconciliation value of the heritage concerned and to use this in linking projects together across the globe;
19. Encourage States and especially States Parties to Convention to donate money to the Fund of the 2001 Convention so that funds are available for emergency situations concerning underwater heritage and encourage WWI underwater heritage experts to use the existing funds foreseen for heritage, for instance at European level, that offer possibilities for work on a global scale;
20. Encourage multidisciplinary research in WWI UCH to raise new possibilities of funding;
21. Ask UNESCO to organize activities that develop connectivity within the WWI UCH community and funding donors and to prepare a set of best practice examples of WWI UCH projects, which have involved collaboration with the public and donors.

The participants also declare the following:

We are assembled in this Meeting in Bruges to remember the importance of immersed heritage of the First World War and salute the progressive awareness of its protection by the States Parties to the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage.

The participants of the "scientific conference on the protection of the underwater cultural heritage of world war I" wish at the same time to express their deep concern with regard to the integrity of the underwater cultural heritage of World War II. Not less fragile than the submerged heritage of the first major conflict of the 20th century, the remains of the Second World War are now tragically threatened by industrial activity, trade and fisheries and the clandestine activities of treasure hunters and unscrupulous divers.

The experts resembled in the Bruges conference solemnly call at States to take also concrete measures at the national level to ensure the inventory, study, backup and enhancement of the underwater heritage of World War II. No one should remain indifferent to the disappearance of this sensitive memory that is so an important part of the heritage of humanity.