



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



Saving the World's Underwater Cultural Heritage

Name and unit of project officer	Ulrike Guerin, CLT/CEH/CHP
Geographical scope:	Global
Duration (in months):	5 years
Partner(s) institutions:	ICOM, ICCROM, Accredited NGO's; UNITWIN Network of Underwater Archaeology; World Underwater Activities Federation (CMAS); national authorities.
Total estimated budget inclusive of Programme Support Costs	6 million USD

Rationale and Background

This project fosters two main issues:

- **The protection of underwater cultural heritage;** and
- **The access to underwater cultural heritage sites.**

Underwater cultural heritage encompasses sunken cities, shipwrecks and submerged prehistoric sites. They embody a magnificent heritage with great, but yet mainly unused potential for research, education and tourism. They also illustrate historic reaction to climate change, which happened over all times of human existence with water height differences of up to 140 m. However, these scientifically most valuable sites are highly threatened by treasure-hunting and industrial operations. Every day sites are destroyed.

While the world has already registered the urgent need to better protect, research and valorize the ocean environment and biodiversity, the second part of the world's heritage, fully acknowledged on land – cultural heritage – has yet to be recognized, safeguarded and made accessible also in the water and sea environs.

Why UNESCO?

UNESCO has engaged in fostering the protection of the underwater cultural heritage since the first days of development of underwater archaeology. As response to the alarming increase in the destruction of submerged archaeological sites by treasure-hunters and industrial activities the Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage was adopted in 2001. In addition, UNESCO has trained underwater archaeologists worldwide, engaged in policy work to achieve better site protection, and fought treasure-hunting and pillaging. It also provides a forum for States to allow them to adopt a common approach to heritage protection and endeavors to change the perception of the public of underwater cultural heritage to make it known and appreciated as that what it is – a unique legacy of humanity.

But to indeed save the underwater cultural heritage, many more urgent actions are needed.

The special value of cooperation with UNESCO is its extensive experience in the field of heritage and especially underwater cultural heritage protection. Since the 1960s, UNESCO has been actively cooperating with governments, national authorities, NGOs, scientists and police forces to improve the protection of the underwater cultural heritage and is a central player in this discipline.

Overall Objectives

- Improve the legal and operational protection of underwater cultural heritage sites and build capacities therefore; and
- Foster responsible access to submerged sites, identifying best practices therefore and raising awareness and heritage visibility.

Main expected results

Expected Result 1

Capacities and means to protect the underwater cultural heritage enhanced.

Expected Result 2

Responsible site access fostered and benefit for the public as well as awareness raised.

Activities and Outputs for the Achievement of the Expected Results

<p>Expected Result 1 - Activity 1</p> <p>Improvement of the legal protection of underwater cultural heritage sites</p>
<p>Output/deliverable 1.1</p> <p>2 intergovernmental meetings of decision makers and representatives of States organized to improve the protection of underwater heritage and ratification of the 2001 Convention</p> <p>Output/deliverable 1.2</p> <p>4 sub-regional and 6 national meetings organized to foster the adaptation of national laws to the ethics and scientific provisions of the 2001 Convention</p>
<p>Expected Result 1 - Activity 2:</p> <p>Improvement of the operational protection of underwater heritage sites and provision of capacities in protection and management</p>
<p>Output/deliverable 2.1</p> <p>4 international training courses on concrete site protection measures organized to prevent pillaging and destructive actions on submerged archaeological sites and to implement the 2001 Convention</p> <p>Output/deliverable 2.2</p> <p>4 international training courses organized to strengthen professional capacities in underwater heritage research and protection, and to build appropriate legal and institutional frameworks</p> <p>Output/deliverable 2.3</p> <p>Substantial support to underwater cultural heritage research and protection centers provided</p>
<p>Expected Result 2 - Activity 3:</p> <p>Public access to underwater cultural heritage increased</p>
<p>Output/deliverable 3.1</p> <p>Meeting on responsible public access to underwater cultural heritage sites organized and missions of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Body fostered to evaluate sites</p> <p>Output/deliverable 3.2</p> <p>Series of Streetview or virtual “bubbles” of underwater cultural heritage sites developed and published on highly visited virtual forum</p>

Expected Result 2 - Activity 4:

Production of sensitization tools for the general public and children

Output/deliverable 4.1

Digital tools for Youth education and mobilization in the field of underwater cultural heritage and the 2001 Convention produced and disseminated

Output/deliverable 4.2

Publications on the value of underwater cultural heritage and mitigation of negative impacts addressed to the general public and to the private sector-enterprises working on the seabed

Output/deliverable 4.3

Exhibitions on the importance of the underwater cultural heritage produced and organized

Beneficiaries and Partners

The different activities foreseen in this project will be addressed to the **following beneficiaries:**

- a. Governmental officials (Ministries of Culture, Tourism, Foreign Affairs, Inner Affairs, Members of the Parliament, etc.)
- b. Legal experts, magistrates, lawyers
- c. Universities
- d. National heritage professionals and associations
- e. Museum staff
- f. Education staff and local communities
- g. Tour operators and professionals involved in the tourism industry.
- h. Protection staff (coast guards, frontier personnel etc.)

UNESCO is in its work supported by a strong force of **partners**, such as international institutions, universities, experts, museums and the eleven leading NGOs working in the field of underwater archaeology. A UNESCO University Twinning Network for Underwater Archaeology associates moreover leading universities to UNESCO. The main professional associations in archaeology and underwater archaeology have officially endorsed and support the UNESCO 2001 Convention. UNESCO's 2001 Convention, its Operational Guidelines, as well as its Scientific and Technical Advisory Body are expected to shape the discipline of underwater archaeology while raising public awareness about the importance of submerged heritage. Already 46 States have ratified the Convention; many more are preparing to join.

Through the work with its partners as well as UNESCO's own operational work in training, policy-making and awareness raising UNESCO has become the leading force in underwater heritage protection today. It occupies the central role in policy-setting and capacity-building in this field. It has high credibility and support in the international community. Its actions can hence be accurately focused and implemented, addressing and involving the crucial stakeholders. It has also a high ability to put actions timely into place due to its more than 50 field offices.

Implementation strategy

UNESCO will be responsible for the overall implementation and coordination of the project. The project will be implemented in close cooperation with, among others:

- National authorities, National Commissions and Universities;
- NGOs accredited to work with UNESCO 2001 Convention (ICOMOS/ICUCH, NAS, SHA, ACUA...);
- Tourism agencies and chambers of commerce;
- Law enforcement agencies.

The overall goal of this project is to better protect underwater cultural heritage sites through the development of laws as well as protection and research capacities, protection tools and awareness raising campaigns among experts, the general public and youth. Furthermore, the present project will foster responsible access to submerged sites and therewith also heritage awareness. It will also seek to increase the ratification of the 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage.

The main goals will be achieved by establishing strategic initiatives and exchanges, capacity-building programmes on research, protection and management of the underwater cultural heritage, as well as by organizing high level regional meetings to adopt common strategies on the national laws harmonization and on the implementation of the 2001 Convention. This will be accompanied by a strong awareness raising campaign, compound of activities and tools addressing youth, the general public, and industrial enterprises affecting potentially the underwater cultural heritage.

Sustainability and exit strategy

The activities here foreseen will be carried out by professionals and stakeholders already trained and accredited by UNESCO on the research, protection and management of the underwater cultural heritage. This reinforces the transmission of the scientific standards approved by the International Community and defended by UNESCO towards the safeguarding of the submerged cultural heritage. Thus the sustainability of the project will be ensured.