



Archaeology and Marine Development in the eastern Mediterranean

Cooperation, sharing data, and integrated policies towards coupling preservation with development

This document summarises some of the main challenges marine cultural heritage (MCH) and maritime archaeology face under the increasing marine development sector activities in the eastern Mediterranean. The document is based on the discussions of the Policy Forum organised by the Honor Frost Foundation Steering Committee on Underwater Cultural Heritage on 27 April 2023 in Alexandria, Egypt. It also collects a series of recommendations and action points agreed by the participants of this event.

Marine Cultural Heritage (MCH) encompasses tangible traces of the historical human connection with the marine space -either underwater or on land-, as it is also reflected in associated intangible values in today's coastal communities. The data contained in the submerged archaeological record is critical to understand changes over long periods of time in the geomorphology of the marine landscape, as well as in the use and exploitation of its resources throughout history. This data is not only essential to understand humanity's past and its relation to the sea, but can yield important insight into mitigation strategies and human adaptability to a changing environment as well as to design sustainable and alternative livelihoods.

In the era of Blue Growth and the Anthropocene, development cannot be conceived without taking into consideration the preservation of the world's resources and understanding the centrality of human history and behaviour in their utilisation. Blue Economy, as an ocean-based growth model, focuses on the ocean as new economic development space where activities such as aquaculture, deep sea mining, oil & gas extraction, renewable energy, coastal urbanisation, land reclamation or marine biotechnology will use, and in many cases exhaust, the resources to meet the needs of the growing world's population.

Economic development in marine space, and the technology used are increasing the human impact on the seabed to all the depths of our seas and oceans. It is debatable whether the oceans can sustainably produce for an ever-growing global society. The fact that the future of the economic industry seems to expand over the ocean and that its resources could soon be depleted if appropriate policies and planning are not implemented, is widely acknowledged.

The convergence of cultural and natural resource conservation, and marine development and sustainability is one of the major challenges of Blue Economy. It links it directly to the international sustainable development agendas such as the UN Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, or the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, and other

international policy frameworks. Ocean sustainability, or at least the path towards its consecution, requires the combined effort of people, nature and culture in the policy- and decision-making process.

The preservation of submerged archaeological sites and the development of marine economic activities are endeavours that, far from opposing each other, benefit from its mutual understanding and cooperation. Traditionally maritime archaeologists have faced the challenge of heritage preservation within marine sector activities in the framework of environmental impact assessments (EIA) and commercial archaeological work. This practice, which is part of many national policies in the Global North, is not yet well implemented in the eastern Mediterranean. The current involvement of maritime archaeologists with the marine sector activities, if it exists at all in the region, does not harness the potential, nor does it prevent damage and loss, of the archaeological data in submerged and coastal sites.

The rapid marine economic development expansion in the eastern Mediterranean since the discovery of oil and gas fields in 2010 can only be sustained if there is a carefully designed planning process. The identification, study and preservation of marine cultural and natural biodiversity become essential to avoid negative impacts to communities' livelihoods and ways of life. Maritime archaeologists and ocean scientists are important intermediaries in the relationship between the marine private sector, and governments. Their knowledge is also essential in policy-making to merge MCH with development, to include a human perspective,

Challenges in terms of ocean governance, integrated management policies, development of capacities and cooperation among stakeholders, and protocols on data sharing and data specifications need to be overcome to optimise the full potential of marine cultural heritage data for sustainable development. The pressures put on the marine resources and on the coastal communities by this unstoppable trend of Blue Growth requires innovative interdisciplinary approaches between numerous stakeholders.

Maritime Spatial Planning has recently emerged as a potential pathway towards achieving this balance through a political, public and multidisciplinary planning process. Italy's national MSP was presented in the forum as a reference to the successful inclusion of maritime cultural heritage conservation in a wider planning process and in its policies.

Recommendations & Actions Points

The following recommendations and action points were discussed at the 5th HFF Policy Forum. Participants included government authorities from relevant administrations (heritage, fisheries, petroleum and energy, shipping, or the Navy), maritime archaeologists and heritage practitioners (i.e. Universities, Departments of Antiquities, commercial archaeologists or Early Career Researchers), non-governmental organisations (notably dedicated to marine environment and cultural heritage preservation), and private companies (i.e., working within the marine sector).

The 5th HFF Policy Forum on Archaeology and Marine Development in the eastern Mediterranean was on 27 April 2023, at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, in Alexandria, Egypt. The Forum agreed the following:

Acknowledging the importance of marine cultural heritage in people's lives, identities, and well-being, as well as its value to design sustainable Blue Economy strategies that include people and their historical interaction with the marine environment,

Recognising the importance to develop alternative ways of economic development that meet the needs and challenges of the eastern Mediterranean, and its peoples, where heritage data can inform the decision-making process

Recommend, in terms of **GOVERNANCE**, to

- Increase cross-administration cooperation, data exchange policies, and dialogue through the establishment of a specific committee and adequate communication channels,
- Include UCH within Marine Spatial Planning strategies,
- Mobilise funds to promote a more sustainable marine economic development practice, prioritising knowledge and preservation of natural and heritage resources,
- Establish National Marine Databases between national administrations involved in the use of the marine area to facilitate UCH preservation and decision making.
- Provide and design incentives for private companies and marine industries (e.g. Oil and Gas) to participate in the dialogues and enhance their activities towards a more culture/nature friendly practice.

Regarding the development and implementation of **POLICIES**, the participants strongly recommend:

- Ratify and properly implement the relevant international legal frameworks, in particular the UNESCO 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, and the harmonisation of all relevant national laws and policies accordingly,
- Explore the possibility of reinforcing existing national laws and establishing incentives and obligations ahead of planning processes for the identification, research and management of UCH in the event of marine development,
- Elaborate Policy Guidelines on:
 - Data sharing and data specifications (between companies, authorities, and heritage practitioners)
 - Importance of underwater cultural heritage for the marine sector
 - Impact Assessments
 - For heritage practitioners on how to work with the private sector
 - For private companies on how to include UCH and work with maritime archaeologists.

In terms of **CAPACITY-BUILDING**, the participants recommend:

- Undertake specific and tailored training workshops and educational material addressing the marine private sector, as well as decision makers across concerned administrations,
- Establish a regional network of expertise in the subject, including a list of experts in the field (for example, establishing a maritime archaeology community of practice (CoP) around the Mediterranean), whereby publications, guidelines, best practice and toolkits can be shared.
- Publish guidelines for good practices by illustrating successful case studies based on the examples presented in the workshop, and beyond.

And, finally, regarding **DATA ACQUISITION AND SHARING**, the participants strongly recommend:

- Develop **data acquisition standards** for archaeological research to facilitate data sharing between companies, authorities, and heritage practitioners. This shall define **interoperability** criteria (format, size, softwares and type of data, scale and resolution...) but also **confidentiality** rules, and **capacity building** needs to produce and manage this complex set of data.

Alexandria, Egypt, on 27 April 2023.