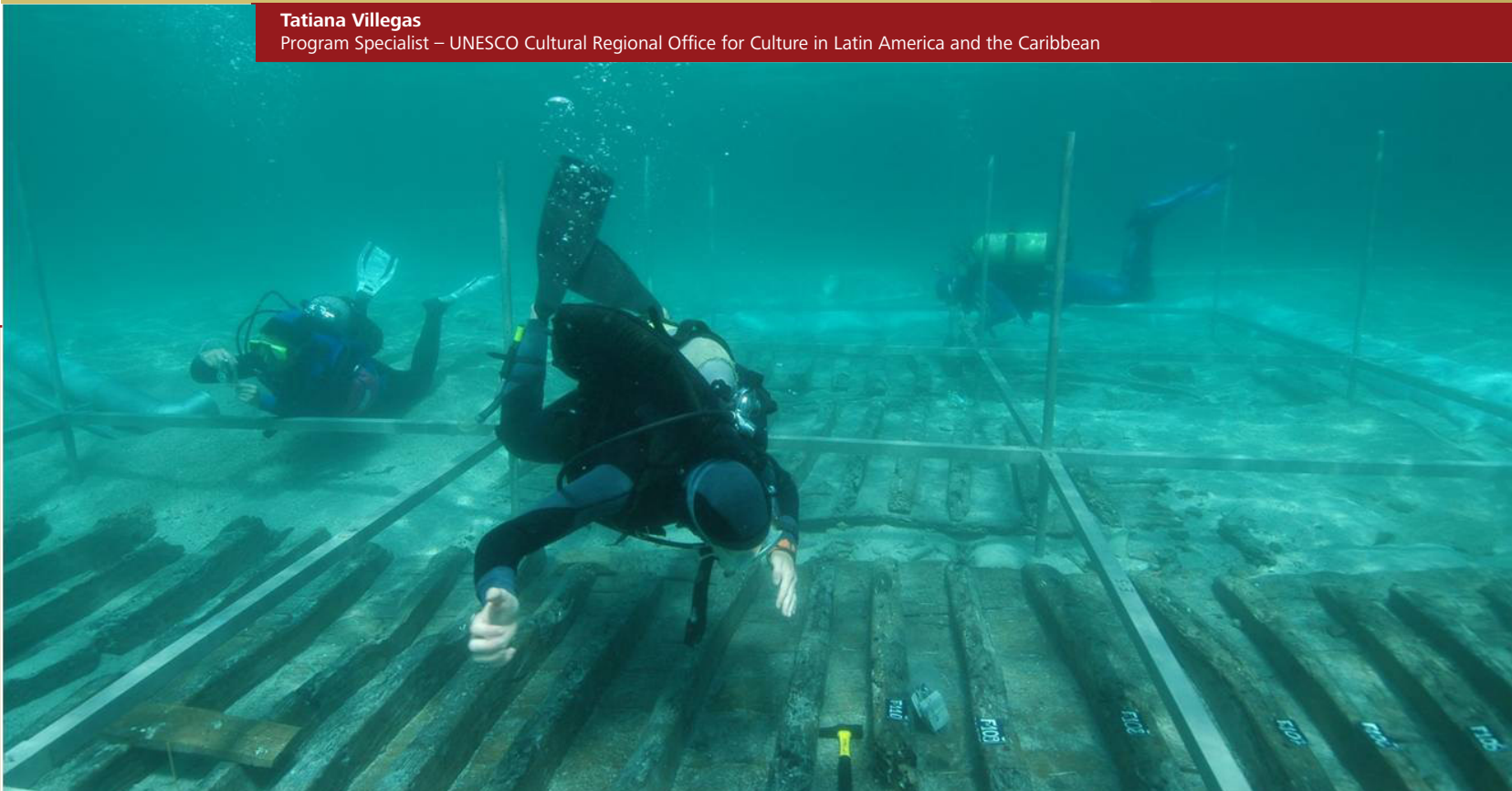


# Culture and Development from the protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage perspective



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Shipwreck from Roman times in Pakoštane Croatia © Croatian Conservation Institute – Underwater Archaeology Department / Photo by PhilippeGroscaux.

Finding a link between development and underwater cultural heritage might seem a difficult task given, in the first place, the lack of knowledge about its meaning, preservation specificities and potentials as a source of information on past events, and secondly, because confusions regarding the interpretation of the concept of development adds to the difficulty in conceiving such a link.

For a very long time, the term development was considered as a purely economic term. With growing environmental and social concerns and thanks to the efforts of the international com-

munity, important meetings were convened, such as the United Nations Conference on Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972, where the concept of ecology related to development was highly debated. Many consider that the term sustainable development was born at this meeting, defining development as “the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brutland Report 1987).<sup>1</sup>

However, the cultural component was yet not part of development fundamental elements. The concept of development focused on the human being



Shipwreck from Roman times in Pakoštane Croatia © Croatian Conservation Institute – Underwater Archaeology Department / Photo by Philippe Groscaux

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and not only on goods evolved gradually. Since then, and having its highest expression in the 1995 Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development “Our Creative Diversity”, recognition has been given to the fundamental role of culture in development and the need to become the focus of any strategy towards this end, as a guarantee for sustainability. In this regard, any effort to protect cultural expressions in any of its forms is focused on sustainable development.

But let’s get back to underwater archaeology and how it plays a role in this context. According to the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage of 2001, the term heritage is understood as “all traces of human existence having a cultural, historical or archaeological character which have been partially or totally under water, periodically or continuously, for at least 100 years”. These traces vary and can be in the form of sunken ships, canoes, port structures, fishing facilities, ritual sites, and cities or villages.

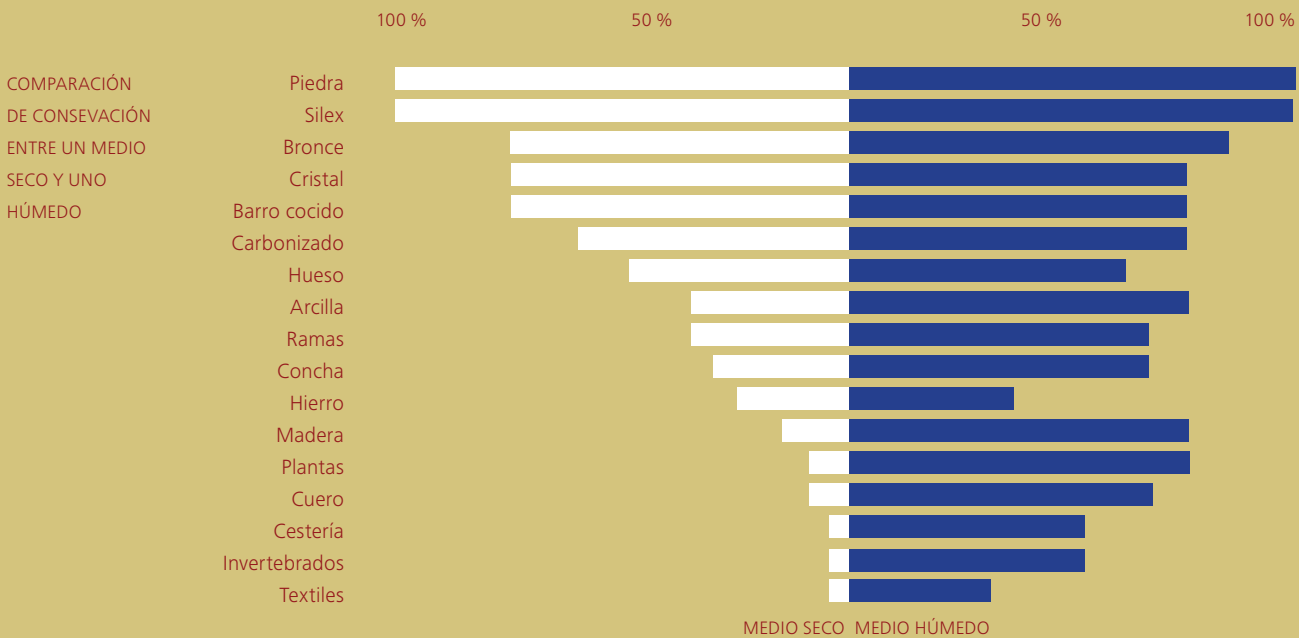
Countless material traces of past and present history lie under Latin American and Caribbean waters, the scene of many naval battles, arousing great scientific interest in recent decades. Vessel remains that bear witness of the navigation flow between America and Europe have been discovered and archaeologically studied in several countries of the region. We will now provide examples

in Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean that have served as a reference to many and that show that underwater cultural heritage has contributed significantly to development.

A characteristic that makes protection of underwater cultural heritage measures relevant and topical is that preservation in an aquatic environment, particularly of organic debris, is much higher than in land, thus preserving traces of the past that remained protected throughout centuries without being altered and that in land would have already disappeared.



Pistol originally made of cast iron, walnut and brass recovered from the Cygne shipwreck in 1808. The iron, which disappeared, was reconstructed with resin following a mark left on the concretion.



© National Archeology Society (NAS) / Alter Coles

Comparison between underwater and dry sites indexes. Frequently, information is better preserved underwater

This gives underwater cultural heritage a unique capacity to provide information on the past. Organic material such as wood, fabrics, leather, paper, among others, are greatly preserved and can be restored to its original state provided they receive the adequate treatment immediately after their stabilized state is altered. The risk lies in the fact that without proper conservation treatment, these remains can be destroyed as soon as they get in contact with air. Many of these remains have no commercial value, but they contain, however, potentially valuable information. Most of them have been sunken due to natural

The Mary Rose starboard  
at the Museum of the  
same name in Portsmouth  
©Mary Rose Trust



catastrophes or naval battles. This means that the vessel, its crew, its cargo and all its belongings subsided in the ocean the same day and at the same time. Everything within the perimeter of that archaeological site undoubtedly belongs to the same age. Such information, if studied under scientific parameters of underwater archaeology, can reconstruct the history of our predecessors with great accuracy. Knowing the evolution of a people through time, its achievements and efforts to guarantee a better life, highly contributes to cultural identity. Knowing what they produced, how they used it, how they transported themselves, how they built, contributes to acknowledging an existence beyond one lifetime.

There are different examples of underwater archaeological discoveries representing the contribution of its communities to development. First and foremost, the case of the Mary Rose, Henry VIII's flag ship<sup>2</sup>, sunken during a naval battle against France off the coast of Portsmouth south of England in 1545. The ship suffered not only during the battle but also as a result of the sea current and organisms that destroyed much of its port side while laying underwater. However, its starboard side was gradually covered by several meters of muddy sediment protecting it for more than four hundred years. It was discovered in 1965 by sport divers who were kind enough to report it to the authorities. Due to its historic significance, the shipwreck was subjected to thorough excavation for more than ten years. A lot of organic debris was recovered from the crew's cloth, ceremonial objects, articles for recreational

purposes or everyday use, like cutlery and dishes, musical, medical and woodwork instruments. A lot of weapons were also recovered allowing to expand knowledge about naval battle war strategies at the time.

The Mary Rose was one of the first naval battle-ships designed. The analysis, study and census of hull parts and elements filled the knowledge gaps in naval construction and war techniques in that environment. Samples of substances found in containers were analyzed at the lab to determine the food they ate and the medicines used by the doctor onboard. The wood, for example, was studied to determine its geographic origin and even the date of its logging. Fabric and other organic material provided information about seamen and officers uniforms. Bone analysis told much about health and sanitary conditions during the Tudor Age. The Mary Rose Museum has become one of the most important tourist attractions at Portsmouth. Over seven million tourists have visited the Mary Rose Museum since it opened its doors in 1983. The resulting income has generated funds for the restoration of the ship and its contents as well as for museum reforms. Today, the Mary Rose and other famous ships in England's history like the HMS Victory<sup>3</sup>, have become a customary tour for any person visiting the region, generating jobs and fully contributing to the city's development.

In Latin America we can mention the HMS Swift, a British corvette based at Egmont Port<sup>4</sup> in the Falkland Islands<sup>5</sup> wrecked in 1770 off the coasts



Collection of artifacts  
from the H.M.S. SWIFT  
corvette at the Mario  
Brozoski Regional Museum  
© UNESCO/PROAS



Submerged city of  
Port Royal, Jamaica  
©UNESCO/INHT

of Argentina, at the Puerto Deseado ria in Patagonia. The ship was discovered in 1982 by a group of local youngsters, who were inspired by the account of the events that led to the ship's disappearance, recorded in the diary of one of the crew members. The account reached the city during the eighties, during the visit of a descendant of said crew member to the city. The writing fell into the hands of a professor who shared it with his students. The boys learned to dive and after a while of prospecting the area described in the 18th century text, they found the vessel remains. Once again, science was fortunate enough to have the contribution of individuals with an ethic attitude, who instead of looting the ship to profit from the sale of the artifacts found, decided to deposit them in a place that could later be turned into a museum and become one day a source of tourist attraction that their city lacked. Realizing that the objects were rapidly deteriorating, they decided to notify the discovery to the authorities. Thus, a scientific research process began that led to the establishment of the Underwater Archaeology Program in Argentina. Today, Puerto Deseado is the venue of the Mario Brozoski Regional Museum, which coordinates excavation, preservation, and storage activities and where the findings of almost a decade of archeological research are exhibited. The only human remains found in the ship were given proper respect and taken to Buenos Aires city where they were buried at the British cemetery during a ceremony organized jointly with the Embassy of the United Kingdom. The Underwater Archaeology Program of the Latin American Institute of Anthropology and Thought is today a reference for the rest of the region and the world.

Another relevant example in the Caribbean region is the case of Jamaica. Two-thirds of Port Royal city that subsided into the ocean after an earthquake on June 7, 1692, have called the attention of scholars around the world. The area where the remains are found has been declared a national heritage site and Jamaica foresees to propose its inclusion in the World Heritage List to UNESCO.

Port Royal was one of the richest cities in the 17th century and its streets were the scenario of commercial transactions between Europe and America, besides being a place privileged by pirates at the time. Traces of houses and local businesses can be seen in the streets that were submerged in an instant. Scientific excavations have enabled a survey of the area and to reconstruct the life in this colonial city. Several museums have been opened in the neighboring town, representing a tourist attraction for Jamaica.

Several remains have been studied in Uruguay, in the coasts of the beautiful Colonia de Sacramento city, declared World Cultural Heritage. The city was founded in 1680, but there are accounts about Spanish and Portuguese forays since 1516. Recently, the bay and the insular territory surrounding the city have been included in the Colonia del Sacramento Management Plan. The argument for this is that Colonia has no meaning without its water. In fact, the architectonic and historic relevance that makes this city one of Uruguay's biggest tourist attraction would have no meaning without taking into consideration its maritime life.

Colonia was a key military and trade center thanks to its strategic location at the Panama River estuary that bathes with its waters the current countries of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. Likewise, the fact that it was the bone of contention for more than a hundred years between the two Powers at the time, has left much wreckage in the area. This new dimension will not only improve the tourist demand but will also sensitize its inhabitants about the importance and relevance of their predecessors and the city where they live in. Archeological research experts hope to have a museum to exhibit and construe all these wreckages, besides becoming an underwater archaeology training center for the region. It is expected that the museum will be located at one of the structures of the industrial heritage of the early 20th century in the outskirts of the colonial city, a project that besides serving



NAS Archaeological  
Register Course in  
Corsica  
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This Hellenistic bronze statue from the 1st to 3rd centuries B.C., representing a young athlete, was found by an amateur diver at the Vele Orkule Island (Croatia), far from any shipwreck in the area. This is an Apoxiomeno-type statue ("skin cleaning") representing a common theme found in ancient Greek votive sculpture: an athlete wiping his sweat off. Its date was established thanks to the remnants of a rodent nest found inside the statue.

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Spring in a "cave", El Templo in Quintana Roo, Mexico  
© UNESCO/Luis Alberto Martos López

the purpose of training and raising awareness on the existence of an underwater cultural heritage, would also serve to revitalize the area where it is located for the benefit of the community.

The scientific community has come to the conclusion that underwater cultural heritage is best preserved in situ, that is to say underwater, due to the preservation advantages already mentioned. This does not mean, however, that it cannot be known by the public and be the focus of development programs. The UNESCO Convention for the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage of 2001 promotes public's responsible non-intrusive access to observe or document in situ underwater cultural heritage. It also recognizes that the public has a right to enjoy the educational and recreational benefits of such access, provided it is not incompatible with its protection. As sport diving has become so popular, cooperation between the diving industry and those in charge of protecting cultural heritage has developed. Visits to wreckages as part of tourist diving programs has become one of the biggest attractions in many places. Together with diving clubs, programs have been designed to sensitize the public about the benefits of the sustainable management of this activity that provides income not only to the diving industry but to the community as well, through hotel and food infrastructure needed for tourism.

A testimony of the benefits that sustainable diving development management entails is the island of Cozumel in the Mexican Caribbean where, together with the rich flora and fauna, cultural remains of ships and artifacts, such as cannons can be found. Cenote diving is also a popular attraction. Statistics show that more than 600 divers visit the island's waters every day, generating the creation of more than 180 diving clubs. Respect for cultural and natural heritage is a rule that has been totally assimilated by the tourist industry after realizing the long-term benefits of sustainable development.

There are many other examples of underwater archeological discoveries, which studied under archeological research rules and safeguarded by cultural heritage protection laws, have contributed to capacity building in this scientific subject and brought about the establishment of museums and cultural centers, which in turn have generated not only jobs, but have also contributed to raise awareness among the inhabitants on the importance of their cultural heritage, a heritage that has contributed to their welfare. If sustainable development is considered to provide access to a more prosperous life, these underwater cultural heritage projects are examples to be highlighted.



Shipwreck in Bia-Salinedda, Sardinia, Italy, 3rd Century A.C.  
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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup>The Brundtland Commission, formally the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), known by the name of its Chairman, Gro Harlem Brundtland, was convened by the United Nations in 1983. The Commission was established to address the growing concern on “the rapid deterioration of the human environment and natural resources and its consequences for social and economic development”. In establishing the Commission, the UN General Assembly recognized that environmental issues had a global impact and held that designing sustainable development policies was in the interest of all nations.
- <sup>2</sup>King of England and Lord of Ireland from April 22, 1509 till his death in 1547. An heir of Henry VII, he was the second King of the House of Tudor, famous for having married six times, bringing about the rupture with the Roman Catholic Church, being head of the English Church (Anglican Church), and for the dissolution of the monasteries and the union of England and Gales.
- <sup>3</sup>Captain Nelson’s ship that took part in the Trafalgar Battle
- <sup>4</sup>Port Egmont was the first settlement of the United Kingdom in the South Atlantic islands.
- <sup>5</sup>Called Islas Malvinas in Spanish