



UNDERWATER CULTURAL HERITAGE UNDER PRESSURE

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Approaches to heritage have changed over the past 50 to 60 years, the exact period over which scientific interest in underwater heritage resources was first operationalized. The emphasis in the first and pioneering years, whether it was on the coasts of Libya or Turkey, in Swiss or Mexican inland waters, in the Caribbean or the Indian Ocean, the Baltic or the Adriatic was on excavation, on exploring and exploiting the newly available heritage resource for research or other purposes. It was through those examples that the discipline of maritime archaeology arose. Present demands, scientific and otherwise, call for more encompassing approaches than focussing on single sites, as was the practice in pioneering years. We have come to realize that the underwater world is a cornucopia that should be frugally managed in order not to fall victim of the ‘tragedy of the commons that are scavenged at will’. Since the ninety-seventies a slow and awkward process of finding common ground and common guidance on how to best manage underwater cultural heritage for the benefit of humankind has developed with Council of Europe guidance, the 1996 ICOMOS Charter, and UNESCO Convention of 2001 as major stepping stones and the extensive management plans for underwater parks and a range of World Heritage nominations as firm illustration. In 2009 the Convention entered into force, but the pressure on the heritage has continued to build up, partly because more heritage sites and landscapes are recognized as such and partly because other interests and uses of seas and inland waters have intensified as well.