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WORKSHOP 2 – Water landscapes: international experiences

Finland: Underwater landscape: How to define and manage it? Answers from landscape research and heritage administration: There is landscape under water

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There is landscape under water just like on land. The European Landscape Convention is applicable to the environments and areas under water in inland and maritime waters. On a global level, the Baltic Sea is called a treasure trove of underwater heritage. On the shores of this underwater museum, the surface is not a border for landscape but it affects perception, safeguarding and evaluation of this landscape.

Under the surface there is a landscape to experience and make an emotional and embodiment connection to, and to appreciate it as an aesthetic environment or object. Underwater landscape can be seen as an area, perceived by people. Its character is a result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.

But the fact is that underwater landscape is not experienced by everyone, it is not commonly thought as landscape. That is why co-operation between heritage administrators, divers, marine biologists, people living by the water, fishermen, marine spatial planners and so on, is needed to make people more aware of the underwater landscape.

Suomenlinna: Already in the early 1990s attention was paid in Finland to the idea of an underwater landscape. An obvious case was the Suomenlinna UNESCO World Heritage Sea Fortress site with several wrecks and underwater structures, although these were not included in the nomination. These objects should be seen as a landscape, as a hidden part of the Suomenlinna's landscape, not only as separate archaeological sites. Since then, the Finnish Heritage Agency (FHA) has promoted the idea of underwater landscape in the form of presentations, lectures, seminars, projects, underwater fieldwork, underwater parks and 3D visualisations. Work has been done in co-operation with different international, Baltic Sea level, national and regional authorities, organisations, diving associations and non-governmental organisations.

The FHA has duties relating to the archaeological and built heritage and environments. Regarding underwater cultural heritage, the Agency is the only managerial body in Finland responsible for the safeguarding, protection and sustainable use of this submerged heritage. To implement this work it has been essential to develop topical themes such as landscape to take into account in addition underwater cultural heritage. The Agency has co-operated for several decades with divers – with the only users of underwater places, spaces and landscapes. This means that divers are considered valuable stakeholders.

In this situation, it has been important that in promoting and developing the idea of underwater landscape in theory, in management and in practice, the work should be done in co-operation with the users of the underwater space, as with academic research and administrative experts.

When we examine underwater landscape we examine the continual interaction of nature and culture

Underwater cultural heritage is mainly mapped as dots but, when thought more widely, they are part of a landscape with cultural meanings and natural values. Maritime cultural heritage is both tangible and intangible, and is associated with the connections people have with the sea.

The underwater landscape is an area under the surface and the way people perceive and imagine it. Its features are the results of the interaction between people and nature, reflecting various dimensions – both negative and positive – of time. It is part of the environment that is perceived, imagined and lived in, either directly or indirectly, by means of various acts, senses and associations.

The underwater landscape consists of environmental and natural elements, flora and fauna, traces left by human activity, such as settlements, wrecks, marine battlefields and graveyards, waterways, harbours, the maritime industry, and the practising of religion. The underwater landscape is the shapes of the sea bed, the elements of the topography, the features of the intermediate water, the light reflected from the water surface, as well as traces of human life.

Understanding underwater landscapes gives a wider perspective to the connection between people and the sea, the confluence of the past and present, and the assessment of environmental changes and sustainable development by taking natural, cultural and social aspects of landscape into account.

Cases: Virolahti quarries and Ruotsinsalmi sea battle area. During recent decades FHA has aimed to produce new heritage information and to improve the existing information. Two current examples concerning underwater issues are the cases of Virolahti stone quarry area and Ruotsinsalmi sea battle area. Both are located in the eastern region of the Gulf of Finland. They are also examples of how the

FHA aims to implement landscape thinking in the protection, management and use of heritage sites on land or underwater.

Virolahti historical stone quarry area belongs to an inventory of “Nationally significant built heritage environments”. In September 2018, the FHA conducted a maritime archaeological survey in the area to locate previously unknown values. During the survey, several stone loading piers were found. In addition nine wrecks still carrying their stone cargo were discovered. The wrecks can be linked to a historical event. In 23rd June 1855, during the Crimean war, an English warship, *Magicienne*, set fire to 30 ships that were fully loaded with stones.

The Ruotsisalmla sea battle area consists of several shipwrecks from the first (1789) and second (1790) sea battles in Ruotsinsalmi in front of the city of Kotka. The sea battles were a part of Swedish King Gustav III’s war with Catherine the Great’s Russia in 1788-90. The second Ruotsinsalmi sea battle remains the largest ever sea battle fought in Scandinavia when measured by the number of men and ships. Over 60 ships were lost in the battle, some of which still lie at the bottom of the sea.

The Ruotsinsalmi sea battle area (26 sq.km) is the largest underwater protection zone in Finland and in the whole Baltic Sea. It is protected by the Antiquities Act (295/1963). The area is based on maritime archaeological surveys and historical maps depicting the battles. The sea battle area has a link to other historical listed sites nearby.

Both cases are examples of holistic landscape thinking, not only with land-sea interaction, but also with land-sea-underwater interaction, elements, landscapes and added values.

Underwater landscape connects physical and imaginative environments, past and present, bodily and virtual experiences.

Compared to landscapes on land, mindscapes and metaphors strongly influence the meaning of landscape in the underwater context, and the ways of perceiving and experiencing it. Visual inspection of underwater landscape requires special technical equipment, and it is a different sensory experience since the senses of hearing and touch are activated.

When asking Finnish divers about their definitions of underwater landscape and their experiences of it, many of them define underwater landscape by aesthetic and emotional definitions. Underwater landscape to them is more about feeling the spirit or *genius loci* of the space than perceiving a special geographical spot. Many divers describe underwater landscape as majestic, relaxing, quiet, timeless.

They also use similes when describing the underwater landscape. They say that it is like a cathedral, or like flying in a video game. Many of them are also concerned about the future and climate change influences for the Baltic Sea.

People who do not dive also have views or images of the underwater landscape. Underwater landscape, for them, is not only a place to visit, it is a mindscape. In underwater landscapes there are traces of the past, not restored to living environments but which are or have become part of the natural environment.

Underwater heritage is strongly connected to nature when examined in situ in an underwater landscape, but, because the underwater heritage and landscape are not easily reached by most people, there are techniques to make it available ex situ.

Kronprins Gustav Adolf and Vrouw Maria

The case of Kronprins Gustav Adolf underwater park is an example of making an underwater site more accessible for the divers and non-divers. The site is also an example of the in situ preservation principle recommended by the ICOMOS 1996 Charter and by the UNESCO 2001 Convention.

In 2000, the Finnish Heritage Agency opened the first underwater park in the Baltic Sea at the wreck of *Kronprins Gustav Adolf*, a Swedish ship, which sank in 1788 off Helsinki. The story of the ship can be linked to the Suomenlinna UNESCO World Heritage Site which the ship visited.

The park was developed, built and tested in co-operation with local divers. Entry to the wreck park is free and non-divers can learn about the story of the wreck in the exhibition of the Maritime Museum of Finland. The park gives visitors the possibility to experience and interpret the wreck, the details, flora, fauna, geology and the whole underwater landscape of the site. At the park, protection of cultural heritage and nature values go hand in hand, each promoting the other.

Finland is now among the countries which have ratified the Faro Convention which is based on the idea that everyone has access and the right to participate and be involved in the management and definition of cultural heritage. In addition it highlights that everyone has an individual and collective responsibility towards cultural heritage.

During the last twenty years we have learned from *Kronprins Gustav Adolf* that divers are interested in the definition and even the implementation of policies dealing with underwater questions. In the summer of 2018 a new underwater trail was opened, the Porkkala wreck park, which is a private initiative in the spirit of the Faro Convention.

Underwater landscapes and soundscapes can be made accessible for different audiences in the form of virtual 3D interactive simulations, digital 3D images, multibeam sonar images, photos, underwater parks, video footages and drawings.

Vrouw Maria – a Dutch merchant vessel – suffered a shipwreck off the coast of south-western Finland in September 1771. *Vrouw Maria* carried a cargo of typical merchant goods, but in the cargo there were also paintings and other luxuries. The wreck is exceptionally well-preserved.

Vrouw Maria is located in the Archipelago National Park in a Natura 2000 Area within a year-round exclusion zone and recreational diving prohibition. The wreck has also a special protection zone based on the Antiquities Act. It lies in an underwater valley at a depth of 41 metres. This all means that the site is not open for the general public.

In the case of *Vrouw Maria*, the main management option has always been to improve the accessibility of the site by other methods rather than raising the wreck or opening it for divers. Since the discovery of the wreck in 1999 the idea of underwater landscape has been one of the leading themes.

During the *Vrouw Maria* underwater project in 2009-2012, a virtual 3D interactive simulation was produced in co-operation with Aalto University MediaLab, with the collaboration of divers, marine biologists and different institutions. The simulation made it possible for museum visitors to make a virtual underwater scenic voyage to the *Vrouw Maria* and its underwater land- and soundscape.

The project and the simulation aimed to enlarge our vision and idea of a wreck site, showing that every site has a unique underwater land- and soundscape and the divers who visited and worked there have memories and experiences of the site. The divers' experiences remind us that heritage is a combination of the physical site and the users of the site.

The underwater landscape is no-one's home, but everyone's right.

None of us has a home under water, but there are remarkable connections, meanings, opportunities and marks of the past in the landscape under the surface, and that is why we have to increase general awareness of underwater landscapes.

The underwater landscape has an important public interest role in cultural, ecological, environmental and social fields. Underwater landscapes also contribute to human well-being and are an important part of the quality of life. Landscape is a phenomenon itself, as are our perception and imagination of it. Surveying the underwater landscape demands co-operation between many sectors. Landscape research can offer a wide view of areas under water, to take into account both natural and cultural values, past and present tracts, used and deserted places, emotionally high and otherwise valuable low areas, not only reached by eyes but experienced by all the senses.

In Finland the FHA have different data and registration systems to work with cultural heritage. There are categories, lists and naming systems to arrange the heritage. The FHA open data is accessible via the internet for professionals, authorities and interested citizens alike. But how do these systems take into account the underwater landscape that entails rights and responsibilities for everyone? Who owns the underwater landscape? How does one work with landscape which does not care about the existing administrative borders?

An open question remaining is – more or less – how to understand, discuss, safeguard, manage, promote, make accessible and use this landscape in a sustainable way? It has been said that we live the “era of blue turn”, “blue humanities”, and “blue history”, but how do we as managers, users, researchers and participants implement this “blue moment” underwater, in the face of the many other global changes?