

Thematic survey on maritime, river and lake heritage

Survey's responses summary

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Introduction

Tangible maritime heritage (such as ships, maritime museums and lighthouses), as well as **intangible maritime heritage** (including practices, knowledge, expertise) constitute a significant part of the general heritage that is often underestimated or even ignored. Following a recent report highlighting the importance of conserving, restoring and transmitting such heritage, France has decided to set up a common strategy for the enhancement of such heritage through cooperation between the Ministry of Culture and the Secretary of State for the Sea.

Such an approach can in fact be extended to the **river and lake heritage**, which has many points in common with the maritime heritage: rivers and lakes are equipped with ports, quays, riprap, slipways and are dotted with industrial facilities and fortifications. They are communication and transport axes. The boats that sail along them are adapted to their physiognomy, their currents and reveal local customs, in the same way as seagoing ships. Rivers and lakes are nurturing: they are a place of culture of its own with its traditions, its professions, its social organization. For these reasons, the survey has been extended to the heritage linked to freshwater in order to consider the maritime, river and lake heritage as a whole and also to consider the experience of countries without a coastline.

The multiple and contrasting relationships of man with the sea, rivers and lakes have also always been an inexhaustible source of inspiration for artists. It is a familiar and unifying subject for citizens, involving many cultural, economic, social and environmental issues at the territorial level.

At a time when the question of the future of the oceans, rivers, lakes and the place of man in his ecosystem is being raised, the conservation, enhancement and transmission of these heritages could be based on reasoned, sustainable and respectful actions common at the European level.

A survey on that topic was distributed to the heritage services of European countries through the **HEREIN network** at the end of 2023, in view of **the Year of the Sea 2025 celebrations in France**: many events and events will mark this year in France, starting with the European Heritage Days (21 and 22 September 2024) whose theme is dedicated to maritime and river heritage, in addition to the European theme, to the United Nations conferences that will take place in Nice in July 2025. This theme is thus placed as a focus of interest at national and international level.

That survey included the following four major questions:

- 1. Can you tell us which structure(s) or authority(ies) are responsible for the policy in favour of maritime, river and lake heritage in your country?*
- 2. Is there a specific protection system for the maritime and/or river and/or lake heritage, material (lighthouses, boats, ports, etc.), natural (coast, coastline, parks, landscapes, etc.) and intangible, or does it benefit from the same protection as the historical ("terrestrial"?) heritage in your country?*
- 3. Is there a specific inventory(ies) of such a heritage?*

4. *Are there events for the public or other actions to raise awareness of the maritime, river and/or lake heritage in your country, such as maritime festivals?*

In addition to France, **12 other countries responded in 2024 to the survey** in a variety of ways, no doubt in the light of the resources provided by the public authorities of each of these countries: Belgium, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Luxembourg, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Slovakia and Switzerland.

The following text is not intended to make an exhaustive analysis of those responses but rather to highlight the particularities of the policies implemented in each country.

Authorities responsible for the maritime, river and lake heritage policy

Most of the countries that responded to the survey have a rather centralised structure and it is the State, through the Ministry of Culture (Estonia, Finland, France, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Croatia, Slovakia) which is the main authority responsible for cultural heritage, sometimes shared with other ministries. In some countries, an agency, placed under the authority of the Ministry of Culture, oversees the management of these heritages, notably in Finland, Estonia, Luxembourg, Monaco and Slovakia.

It should be noted that in Finland, maritime archaeology and underwater cultural heritage are one of the main themes of the Finnish Heritage Agency, the key authority on the cultural environment, which in 2021 published an internal action plan for maritime cultural heritage entitled "Cultural Heritage of Waters". This plan describes the Agency's objectives for the years 2021 to 2025 in terms of identification, determination and protection of these heritages and lists 120 recommendations (restoration of watercourses, cultural and sustainable tourism, etc.).

In the Netherlands, authority is shared between several ministries, including the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (for cultural landscapes, protected sites and monuments), the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (in charge of national parks, dunes or geological monuments), But the most important is the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, which is responsible for improving the quality of life, better air and water quality, lane management and flood protection.

In France, the State has forged a tool, the "Conservatoire du littoral et des rivages lacustres", to acquire coastal areas and thus protect them from urbanisation, and in each region, a decentralised service, the Regional Directorate of Cultural Affairs (DRAC) is in charge of these issues and at the service of the public on these themes (example of the DRAC Bretagne).

In countries with a federal structure, for example Switzerland, authority is shared between the Federal Office of Culture, which is responsible for developing heritage policy (tangible and intangible) and the 26 cantons of the Swiss Confederation with authority for preservation.

Similarly in Flanders, the structuring is shared between the federal state, the Communities (responsible for culture and intangible heritage), the Regions (intangible heritage and archaeology) and some provincial or local authorities may have their own heritage policy. The Flanders Heritage Agency is responsible for maritime and river heritage, alongside the State Secretariat for the North Sea, responsible for the protected heritage of the North Sea (29 sites) and the Governor of the Province of Flanders for unprotected underwater cultural heritage and reported finds. A cooperation agreement under the authority of the Federal Public Health Service brings together all the actors working on these different assets.

Systems for the protection of maritime, river and lake heritage

In most of the countries that responded to the survey, protection systems and legislation are the responsibility of the state. Maritime, river and lake heritage, movable or immovable, almost everywhere benefit from the same protection as "terrestrial" heritage.

There are no regulations exclusively concerning the protection of maritime, lake and river heritage, except in Montenegro where there is a specific law on submerged heritage and in Croatia where the Nature Protection Law protect it.

In Montenegro, a law for the protection of local, national and international heritage is in force: With it, the Ministry of Culture regulates heritage in all its meanings: landscapes, buildings and furniture, intangible heritage. A specific law concerns submerged heritage. It is applied by expert archaeologists belonging to the Centre for Conservation and Archaeology.

In Croatia, the management of maritime and river heritage, which is the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture, is based on the Act on the protection and preservation of cultural property, and maritime, river and lake natural heritage is protected by the Nature Protection Act.

In Finland, the Finnish Heritage Agency conducts heritage policy for the Ministry of Education and Culture. The "Cultural Heritage of Waters" plan, implemented for the period 2021-2025, has made 120 recommendations also related to natural heritage and leads to the restoration of archaeological sites, lighthouses and boats. "Blue Water cultural heritage information". Many sites are linked to maritime heritage, which is why this theme has always been favoured by the Heritage Agency. Since 2019, 22 museums with regional responsibility have been opened. Regional experts have been appointed. The Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency, which manages canals, lighthouses, and more. has concluded an agreement with the Heritage Agency. The Forest Administration directly manages land belonging to the State. To date, 4 Finnish elements are on the UNESCO list of intangible heritage, the national inventory of living heritage includes 86 elements and there is finally a Wiki-inventory of living heritage (containing 240 proposals from more than 400 communities).

In Monaco, it is the Heritage Institute that deals with matters relating to maritime heritage, there is no specific protection or inventory specific to maritime heritage, but the Principality has created marine protected areas (Larvotto and Spélugues drop-off marine areas for example) and Monaco has joined the RAMOGE agreement (1976), with the aim of preserving the marine environment. and to create, with France and Italy, the Pelagos Sanctuary, an international maritime area dedicated to the protection of marine mammals and their habitats. The year is marked by the Fête de la Mer organised on Saint Peter's Day at the end of June in collaboration with the various Monegasque institutions (Yacht Club, Town Hall, Oceanographic Museum, Prince Albert II Foundation, etc.), as well as a blessing at sea and sea shanties by the choir of the Rainier III Music and Theatre Academy. On 27 January, Saint Devotee (a young Christian girl martyred in Corsica, whose body, placed on a boat, ran aground in Monaco), patron saint of the Principality, a blessing of the sea was pronounced and the saint was evoked for the repose of the souls of sailors who perished at sea.

In Belgium, Immovable heritage (buildings, structures, landscapes, archaeology on land and on beaches) is covered by the Decree on immovable heritage and the Floating Heritage and Ships Decree (*Floating Heritage and ships decree*).

In Slovakia there is no specific protection but a law defining the modalities of the restoration and conservation of landscapes, national and regional monuments and intangible cultural heritage. The Ministry of Culture, which is responsible for implementing it with the help of the Slovak Monuments Board and the regional councils, also owns and is responsible for buildings.

In Switzerland, the tangible river or lake heritage enjoys the same protection as the historical heritage on land and is governed by the same federal and cantonal laws and regulations. At the national level, this is in particular the Nature and Landscape Protection Act (LPN). In the same way, the Federal Office of Culture, in charge of river heritage, develops heritage policies, carries out and updates an inventory of cultural assets of national

importance, including lake and river elements as well as the 56 pile dwelling sites inscribed on the World Heritage Lists, shared with Germany, Austria, France, Italy and Slovakia.

In Luxembourg, the Ministry of Culture, via the National Institute for Architectural Heritage, relies on a 2022 law on cultural heritage.

The response of Moldova proposes to examine a steel structure bridge at Hungeni built by Gustave Eiffel in 1876.

Inventories

In most European countries, there are inventories of cultural heritage, in which many elements of maritime, river and lake heritage are included, whether movable, immovable, natural, or intangible.

Only Finland has conducted thematic inventories concerning maritime heritage: a specific inventory on maritime heritage (STORM) was conducted from 1996 to 2000: pilot stations (127), lighthouses (45), beacons. Another was conducted in 2015-2017 on waterways, preceding the description of maritime cultural heritage in Finland (2019). In addition, an "Inventory of nationally significant built cultural heritage sites" (RKY) which includes bridges and canals, ports, waterways,... containing more than 1200 elements and an archaeological inventory (VARK, 1500 elements) have been carried out. There is a register of ancient remains containing more than 2000 underwater discoveries, 750 of which are protected.

Constructive work was carried out jointly by the Finnish Heritage Agency and the Maritime Administration and a description of maritime cultural heritage in Finland was published in 2019 to describe the type of maritime and underwater cultural heritage existing in Finland, the themes and heritage sites that compose it, as well as possible special regional features and characteristics of cultural heritage. Finland has many maritime museums.

Finally, the Inventory of Landscape Areas of National Interest (VAMA), which covers the whole of Finland, includes marine sites, landscapes marked by forestry or river valley landscapes. Some underwater seascapes are described.

In Croatia, a Cultural Property Register of immovable, movable and intangible cultural property includes many examples of maritime, river and lake heritage: it currently contains 3 fishing structures, 8 traditional boats, 26 lighthouses, fishing tools, numerous museums, market halls, arsenals, ports, as well as the Maritime College. 6 cultural properties of river heritage have been inscribed in the Register of Properties Cultural. Mills on rivers, some landscapes and some historic urban areas are protected in this way. Finally, there is the Geoportal for immovable cultural properties.

In the Netherlands, the agency "Maritime Heritage" is the operational player in the protection of maritime heritage: inventories, boats, buildings, lighthouses, dikes, aquatic sites. Several inventories exist without there being a specific one for maritime heritage. The "Water Defence Lines" from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, and the Amsterdam Canal are recognized as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO. Maritime Stepping Stones (MaSS) is a database of stories about shipwrecks and underwater sites. MaSS is an app that allows anyone interested in underwater cultural heritage to contribute by adding new sites, information, images, etc.

In Belgium, floating objects are the subject of an inventory, the authority of which lies with the Flemish Heritage Agency (Heritage Afloat). Through various agencies, such as the Flanders Heritage Society, real estate assets are considered.

In Switzerland, each canton has a cantonal inventory of the historical/archaeological remains discovered on its territory (most of which are not accessible to the public).

In Luxembourg, the material heritage including mills and associated hydraulic installations is listed on the <https://inpa.public.lu/dam-assets/fr/publications/liste-immeubles-objets-proteges.pdf> site and there is a private inventory for the history of industry in Luxembourg, including watermills: <https://industrie.lu/millen.html>.

In Estonia, there is no thematic inventory, but a very complete register of shipwrecks that occurred between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries has been drawn up.

Hungary is currently deprived of a coastline. Before the First World War, it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and in medieval times united with Croatia and therefore had remains and wrecks. MH and archaeology are the responsibility of the Ministry of Construction and Transport. Today, museum ships can be found on the shores of lakes or rivers. Bridges, quays and landscapes are protected, and Budapest is on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The national jewels, known as "Hungarikum", are considered the most valuable elements of the national heritage. This is the case of the artisanal fishing of the lower Danube as intangible heritage. The list of archaeological sites and historical monuments is reserved for professional users in safety conditions. A particular work was conducted and counted in the nineteenth century more than 4300 "shipmills" or mill boats. Replicas were built in 2008 by the Guild of the Mills of Ràckeve. The river heritage is de facto under the authority of the Ministry of Construction and Transport. Archaeology has yielded the remains of giant sturgeon fisheries.

Main events for the public

All the countries that responded to the survey reported local and/or national events on this theme of river, lake and maritime heritage, listed below, which take place from the end of May to September. It would therefore be appropriate to think about the possibility of a European event around maritime and river heritage.

There are also events shared by several countries, including International Danube Day on **29 June** and World Water Day on **22 March**.

In Flemish Belgium, major festive events are organised every year: the most famous is the Ostend at anchor, which attracts **several hundred thousand visitors** every year towards the end of May.

Switzerland also organises several events on Lake Geneva, such as the Compagnie Générale de Navigation's naval parade for the Belle Epoque fleet **at the end of May**, or regattas such as the Bol d'Or in **June** or the Mammüt Flossrennen raft race, which brings together many visitors every year in **May**. The Swiss association "Wasserfahren" organises events around the practice of boating on the flat-bottomed boats "Weidling". Finally, the Logboat Regatta is a prehistoric canoe race organized in turn by the six countries concerned (Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Slovenia, Switzerland) by the World Heritage property "Prehistoric Sites around the Alps" in **June**.

In Slovakia, festivals evoking historical traditions relating to rivers and transport are organised throughout the year.

The Netherlands also organises many "nautical events", such as the popular Nautical Days or Open Fleet Days (**early July**) or during the International Port Days (**early September**). These "Nautical Days" or "Open Fleet Days" are organized with the Ministry of Defence. In addition, major institutions, such as the Marine Navy Museum, Zuiderzee museum, Scheepvaartmuseum, in Amsterdam, Maritiem Museum Rotterdam, regularly organize festive and cultural events on this theme.

In Croatia, many events take place around maritime heritage: regattas, maritime festivals, often animated by eco-museums, **from April to September**, but also events around river heritage, particularly as part of the International Danube Day, on **29 June**.

Hungary also celebrates this International Danube Day, on **29 June**, from Island's Cove to Ràckeve and Szigetújfalu, as well as World Water Day, on **22 March**. The carnival of Mohàcs on the Danube is on the UNESCO lists, it recalls a historical episode by using wooden boats.

In Luxembourg, every year in **August**, the Racjèsmillen festival takes place, which also participates in the European Heritage Days.

Montenegro no longer organizes special events, but there used to be a television program on this subject.

In Finland, "hundreds of events" are held every year, such as the Kotka Festival at the end of July, founded in 1962, or the annual steamboat regattas held in various locations in Finland in July or the annual Hango sailing competition at the beginning of July.

In Estonia, many festivals and maritime festivals take place throughout the summer: sea festival, Tallinn maritime days...

In France, there are **many maritime festivals throughout the year** and along the coasts, which are very popular. They are sometimes the heirs of traditional votive festivals (fishermen's festivals of Saint Pierre in Fécamp, Sainte Ouine in Saint Malo, Saint Louis in Sète), blessings before leaving for the Great Fishing... Others are supported by associations, such as the Fêtes Maritimes de Douarnenez or Brest. There are similar festivals on the rivers such as the Fête de Loire in Orléans.

The Principality of Monaco has a special link with the sea: the Fête de la Mer, held at the **end of June**, celebrates Saint Peter's Day, patron saint of fishermen, and every year, on **26 January**, the eve of the feast of Saint Devote, patron saint of the Principality, the Bishop of Monaco blesses the sea and invokes the Saint for the repose of the souls of sailors who have perished at sea. Finally, at the instigation of Prince Albert 1st, the Oceanographic Institute – Albert 1st Foundation (created in 1906, with the aim of "making people know, love and protect the ocean") and the Oceanographic Museum (inaugurated in 1910) are pursuing a mission of environmental mediation and awareness on the protection of the oceans.

UNESCO Conventions on the Underwater Heritage and the Intangible Cultural Heritage

Almost all the countries that responded to this questionnaire have ratified the **2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage** and all have ratified the **2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)**, which does not involve protection measures. The objective is to 'identify and define the different elements of intangible cultural heritage present in its territory, with the participation of communities, groups and relevant non-governmental organizations' (Articles 11 and 12 of the Convention).

For example, in the List Switzerland of living traditions, 8 elements concern the lake and river heritage: Swimming in the Rhine, Swimming in the Aare in Bern, Mammut Flossrennen, Belle Epoque trips in the Lake Geneva region and Weidling regattas, (Weidlingsfahren) on an emblematic boat of Lake Geneva, swimming in winter and Christmas Cup, Lateen sailing on Lake Geneva.

The Estonian Centre for Folk Culture manages the list of intangible cultural heritage, which has 8 themes related to maritime heritage and fisheries.

In Finland, the Sami Museum Siida is of regional and international interest and has a strong focus on ICH.

In Hungary, artisanal fishing in the Lower Danube region is listed as intangible heritage at the national level and the "Busójárás" carnival of Mohács, the arrival of the Busó people who cross the Danube from an island on local wooden boats, is listed as intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO. Tangible elements of Hungarian heritage are the wrecks of the First World War of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, such as the SMS Szent István, covered by the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage of 2001 and protected by law in Croatia.

In Luxembourg, traditional grassland irrigation systems and mills are listed in the National Inventory of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and inscribed on the UNESCO ICH List since 2023 (https://iki.lu/post/show_cat/12). There is also a private inventory of industrial heritage, including mills.

In France, the Martinique skiff, from construction to navigation practices, was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (<https://ich.unesco.org/fr/listes>). The maritime, river and lake heritage is treated according to the ordinary law of the law of 31 December 1913 (CASL law, transcribed in the heritage code) and the 1930 law on sites and there is no specific national inventory. There are thematic inventories in certain regions, for example on the fortifications of the Atlantic Wall in Normandy.

Conclusion

A common feature to all countries having responded is that the Ministry of Culture (sometimes through its satellites or regional branches, agencies, councils, departments) always ensures the protection of maritime heritage and monitors or ensures its restoration. In all cases, a law defines the rules. For historical or geographical reasons, this monitoring can be shared with other ministries (infrastructure, defence, transport, water regulation).

Outside Finland, maritime heritage is not the subject of a specific inventory. It is still treated according to the common heritage law in force in the country and considered at its true value as a structuring element of landscapes and as a testimony to societies that have disappeared or been transformed. Even if it is probably imprudent to generalize without having received a response from Italy, Spain, Greece, Romania or Poland, we can probably venture to note that the approach of the 13 countries that responded is relatively homogeneous, each of them being aware of the need to take into account this specific heritage, whether it is strictly river-based, for countries without a coastline (Slovakia, Hungary, Luxembourg) or river-sea.

In almost every country, one or more maritime and river heritage properties are inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage Lists, which confirms their interest on an international scale. Intangible cultural heritage has been widely considered for the past twenty years at a level equivalent to or higher than in countries where the culture of historic monuments is the oldest.

This is expressed in a general way through the many festive events organised around the maritime and river heritage, and in particular that of boats (what are referred to in France as "old rigging") in each of the countries that responded to the questionnaire. It should be noted that some countries are showing a very strong interest in maritime heritage, for which they have deployed all the appropriate tools (inventories, protection, animation and transmission). This is the case, for example, in the Netherlands and Croatia, but also especially in Finland, which has done considerable work in this area.

To exchange and discover in more detail and compare methods and practices, it would be interesting to organize a meeting with the different countries participating in the HEREIN network in the framework of the Year of the Sea 2025 in France.

Annex

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