



Cultural Heritage in the Baltic Sea States Working group “Underwater Cultural Heritage”

Progress report 2000 – 2001

Mandate

The group was established after the resolution of the Ministers of Culture in Gdansk, May 1999, to investigate further the possibilities of co-operation in the field of cultural heritage. One of the themes for co-operation is the protection and management of underwater cultural heritage of the Baltic Sea.

Aims and goals

The group was mandated by the Monitoring group to explore the possibility to draft a regional agreement among the Baltic Sea States for the protection and management of the underwater cultural heritage and to develop other appropriate themes for co-operation in this field.

Participating countries

Nominations for membership of the working group was given by Denmark, Finland, Latvia, Poland, Russian Federation and Sweden. The group has been chaired by Denmark.

Meetings

The group has held 2 meetings. First meeting in Copenhagen 9 – 10 November 2000, second meeting in Gdansk 12 – 13 March 2001. A third meeting was scheduled but was cancelled due to lack of participants. In the meetings participants have represented Denmark, Finland, Poland and Sweden. In Gdansk also Germany was represented.

Results 2000-2001

The group has not been able to draft a Regional agreement on the protection of the underwater cultural heritage of the Baltic Sea. It has seemed premature in the light of the global endeavour to draft a convention for this purpose in UNESCO. The differences of opinion in these negotiations also seem to make a regional agreement built on the same principles unlikely. In stead a draft declaration has been circulated but has received substantial hesitations from certain States.

For the time being the group – even if the members of the working group have expressed their personal support for an agreement or a declaration – can not envisage the development of further legal instruments (binding or not-binding) among the Baltic Sea States.

Work programme 2001-2003 and long term perspective

Preamble

The working group has considered the need for further co-operation in this field and wants to point out that the protection and study of underwater cultural heritage of the Baltic Sea is an important contribution to the understanding of the history of this region. It also wants to point out that the survey, investigation and protection of this heritage requires a highly specialised staff and that exchange of experience in this rather young discipline is necessary.

The Baltic Sea has very great potentials in the field of underwater cultural heritage, but also presents great risks to this heritage due to accessibility of all the seabed of the Baltic Sea. Further co-operation is therefore needed. The Working group would like to have its mandate prolonged if the Ministers so decide.

At the same time the working group wants to point out the limited participation in the work of the group. In the view of the working group this is not due to lack of interest in the States not participating but to financial constraints. The working group suggests that this problem is discussed further.

Important fields of co-operation

The group has discussed other fields of co-operation on underwater cultural heritage.

- Baltic Sea Wreck trail.

On the basis of experience from Finland the group has studied the possibility to establish a network of underwater cultural parks with interesting and accessible wrecks representing different periods and functions in the marine traffic of the Baltic Sea. Suitable wrecksites have been nominated by Finland and Sweden but other countries have declared their willingness to participate. The purpose of the network will be to exchange experience in the management of such “underwater parks” and eventually to established joint marketing of this “wrecktrail”.

- Survey methods.

On the basis of Swedish experience the working group has discussed the possibility to develop a network for the study of survey strategies and methods. This network is not yet established.

- Monitoring of the underwater cultural heritage.

The need to monitor the development of deterioration of underwater cultural heritage is recognised by the working group. A network to exchange experience in this field has been proposed and Sweden will take further initiatives to establish such a network.

- Guidelines for data presentation / core data standards.

In order to exchange information on underwater cultural heritage guidelines for data presentation of core data is needed. Denmark has experience in this field and will consider to take the lead in the establishment of a network for this purpose. Poland has offered to join the network and to seek to co-ordinate the data presentation with the international standards for hydrographic data presentation.

- Travelling exhibition.

A travelling exhibition on the underwater cultural heritage of the Baltic Sea was envisaged for 2001. However for reasons of lack of funding this has not been possible.

- TV programmes.

A series of TV programmes on wrecks of the Baltic Sea has been proposed by Poland and the Polish Television has offered to make such a series of programmes. The members of the working group will consider suitable wrecks for this.