

UNESCO Education Initiative - Heritage for Dialogue and Reconciliation: Safeguarding Underwater Cultural Heritage from World War I

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From 2014 to 2018, the international community will commemorate the Centenary of World War I. This will be a time to remind all generations of the necessity for peace and to provide education on the war, specifically education derived from preservation efforts and research conducted on WWI heritage.

The ‘war at sea’ - including naval battles and U-boat actions - was an important and integral part of WWI. The protection of WWI’s underwater cultural heritage is necessary to enable humanity to understand and remember the horrors of war and its devastating human consequences, and to encourage everyone to endeavor to preserve lasting peace. Heritage is the reminder of the need for reconciliation, understanding, and for all nations to live peacefully together.

During the centenary, schools will be challenged to pay attention to the different aspects of WWI. This can take many forms: a school visit to a maritime museum, a temporary exhibition on a particular aspect of the First World War, a visit to a commemorative location, reading poetry on the First World War during language courses, an online virtual dive to a First World War shipwreck, etc., the list is not restricted. All these activities provide the opportunity to set students up for an interest in the topic by providing opportunities to learn about the many faces of war, peace



Figure 1. HMS Vindictive memorial in Ostend
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and reconciliation.

But then comes the moment that each teacher has so often experienced: it's one thing to participate in an enthusiastic or touching activity, quite another to shape these learning experiences in a workable, measurable and sustainable pedagogical project which is complementary to the final or cross-curricular outcomes.

UNESCO's Manual, 'Heritage for Dialogue and Reconciliation', will present teachers with the necessary tools to shape this process.

The purpose of the Teacher's Manual is to:

- provide content on the topic of underwater cultural heritage in relation to WWI and to incorporate this in the course outline of topics such as human rights and responsibilities, use and abuse of power, conflict resolutions, awareness of cultural heritage, etc.
- provide additional information on the pedagogical approaches of peace and remembrance education
- build confidence in teachers when teaching about underwater cultural heritage, peace, remembrance and reconciliation
- assist teachers in effectively integrating local initiatives on the centenary of WWI and underwater cultural heritage in the curriculum
- furnish teachers with learning activities, examples of best practices, didactical suggestions and examples, which stimulate both the commemoration of the First World War through the example of underwater cultural heritage, and innovative reflections on peace, reconciliation, human rights and tolerance today

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was created in 1945 in the wake of the two World Wars, which generated awareness of the urgent need to construct lasting peace in an increasingly interconnected world. UNESCO's Constitution states that 'since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.'

In creating the United Nations system and a specialized agency like UNESCO, the international community sought hence to 'advance, through the educational and scientific and cultural relations of the peoples of the world, the objectives of international peace and of the common welfare of mankind' (preamble of

UNESCO's Constitution).

The wide diffusion of culture and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace were considered indispensable to the dignity of men and women. It was singled out as a sacred duty of all nations. The international community created UNESCO for this purpose. Today, among the many ways in which UNESCO achieves this noble objective, the promotion and dissemination of knowledge and overseeing the protection of the world's common heritage stands out.

The UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage

The Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in 2001 as response to the destruction of underwater archaeological sites by commercial treasure-hunters, and certain industrial activities. The convention also reflects the growing recognition of the need to ensure the same protection to underwater cultural heritage as that already accorded to heritage on land.

Underwater cultural heritage, as defined by the convention, refers to all traces of human existence having a cultural, historical or archaeological character that have been partially or totally underwater, periodically or continuously, for at least 100 years. This includes millions of shipwrecks, sunken cities, traces of humans on submerged landscapes, as well as underwater sacrificial offerings and religious sites in lakes and rivers.



Figure 2. Canakkale Seddulbahir Majestik © Harun Ozdas/UNESCO

In light of the 100-year rule, underwater remains from the First World War will begin to fall under the protection of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage in 2014.

Peace Education based on the Understanding of Heritage

The First World War was one of the most destructive conflicts in the world's recent history. The First World War touched the lives of nearly every man, woman and child in the countries that took part. The war reached out and affected, without distinction, almost everyone's life in some way or another. The impacts of the First World War are still prevalent today.

Millions of people across the world today still feel moved by the enduring works of art that were created as a response to the atrocities of War. They also face the political legacies. A new world order emerged. From the ashes of the First World War, new countries were created in Europe and the Middle East. The First World War was also, however, a turning point in society's perception of war, which encouraged more lasting peace for the future. In particular, WWI led to the creation of the first permanent international organization with the mission to maintain world peace, the League of Nations, predecessor of the United Nations system.

The consequences of many of these political changes have an impact today, nearly a century later.

For these reasons, it is essential to remember and learn from those who sacrificed their lives during those four years, 1914 – 1918. The First World War created a common sense of history that, decades later, still links people from many disparate nations.

The WWI Centenary provides a unique opportunity to remind all peoples of the importance of peace and to enhance our understanding of history through the research and preservation of heritage.

World Heritage is at the Heart of UNESCO's Peace Mandate

From majestic waterfalls and lost cities to mysterious landmarks and natural wonders, UNESCO World Heritage sites are often equated with dreams and beauty. And yet, the outstanding value of a world heritage site is first and foremost assessed according to the principles of sustainable development, authenticity, environment, scientific conservation, identity and the history of peoples. This role distinguishes itself markedly in the determination of sites of memory, and UNESCO must meet the immense challenge of uniting peoples on an unprecedented scale in order to pave a path towards peace. Our common heritage is poignantly revealed in some of the most tragic events of human history.

The protection of world heritage helps us to better understand the various

aspects of peace. Some monuments of world heritage have themselves played a part in processes of war and peace, such as the concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, the peace dome in Hiroshima or the bridge in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Other world heritage is reminiscent of both nature and humankind's beautiful creations. Many monuments of world heritage symbolize our eternal desire for freedom, justice, mutual understanding and respect, love and friendship. They represent our fundamental human rights and constitute the indispensable ingredients of peace and development for each individual, every society and for the world as a whole.

Our history and our heritage are part of who we are. History and heritage influence how we evolve, passing knowledge on to future generations, and provide a basis for tradition and value.

Therefore, WWI heritage tells a missing part of the true story, the story as experienced by average men and women. Heritage allows us to remember, reconcile, feel, and understand. It brings victim's emotions from battle or conflict to us in a tangible and touching way.

Underwater cultural heritage from WWI is a special witness to this story. Until now, however, it has been barely visible, barely researched, and barely understood. Written naval history on the First World War tells of fights, strategies, technologies, and power, but the wreck sites, which are filled with the remains of those who fell in battle, tell us a tragically different tale. Many of the wrecks are gravesites. Reports of sinking ships or of recovering the dead speak of immense suffering and grief. By telling us the human tragedy of war in every single tale,

the reports stand as a call for peace and reconciliation.



Figure 3. Posters on Underwater Cultural Heritage and Peace created by the Art department of the Municipal Secondary School Cadix © Jan Landau/ Muncipal Schools of the City of Antwerp

History and heritage give hope when shared among nations. They allow nations to step away from past victories and defeats. The experience of war, and its effect on people and heritage, can help foster peace and reconciliation.

The relics of war belong to all of humanity, and humanity shares the responsibilities of protecting these relics and contributing to a more aware and peaceful society. By sharing WWI heritage,

those nations that were involved in the war can embrace a shared part of their identity. Tolerating, respecting, and showing compassion for different cultures, including those of former enemies, fosters peace.

Learning about Underwater Cultural Heritage, Reconciliation and Peace

Shipwrecks, coastal installations, cemeteries, memorials, battlefields and shelters are among the many tangible traces of the First World War. Together with museums, traditions and written personal testimonies, they form the last bridge between past and present, as there are no longer any direct eyewitnesses. They serve as a reminder of dramatic moments from the past to the future generations. But heritage is more than purely material relics of the past. It is something that is part of our identity. It becomes part of our distinctiveness and our reaction to the present world. Thus the national or international community has come to see it as inherently significant. Value is assigned to the sites by many actors, including local communities, associations, youth, heritage workers, artists, journalists and politicians.

Education plays an important role in our perception and appreciation of heritage, but also in our reaction to it. Education reaches all future citizens. At school, young people learn more than simply how to read and calculate. They also learn about peace, respect and tolerance. They learn to work together, they learn who they are and how this relates to the world they live in. In addition to giving each individual child a future, education contributes to building the future of the country and of the international community. History, heritage and the past play an important role here to ensure a safe and peaceful future.

A specific characteristic of this kind of education (what we call remembrance education) is its starting point – the memory of the past. Ultimately, however, the goal is what is important. We do not study the past only to know or understand it. The study of the past primarily concerns what we can learn from it in order to improve the future.

We can teach remembrance education based on heritage from three aspects:

1. Knowledge and insight
2. Empathy and solidarity
3. Reflection and action

These three aspects can be seen as objectives and educational platforms.

‘Knowledge and insight’ is fundamental to a good start. When we explore

aspects of the First World War and underwater cultural heritage with students, we do this according to the correct, neutral historical and scientific information. Without knowledge and insight, ‘empathy and solidarity’ and ‘reflection and action’ remain meaningless, and there is a risk that we will surrender to a mythical or nationalist approach to the past.

Nevertheless, we cannot manage with knowledge and insight alone. If we ask only for the facts, the past will remain something that happened outside of the student’s life and in a distant bygone era. Empathy and solidarity enables us to question the past according to human potential or impossibilities. This question is anthropological in nature, and is relevant at all times.

Without opportunities to apply what we learn through ‘reflection and action’, ‘knowledge and insight’ and ‘empathy and solidarity’ are superficial. In other words, we need to focus the educational process on the world in which we live and on contemporary society, either at the national or global level. We must maintain a view for a better future. Looking to the past, which building blocks do we need for peace?

Teaching Manual ‘Heritage for Dialogue and Reconciliation’

UNESCO’s teaching manual ‘Heritage for Dialogue and Reconciliation’ will help schools to prepare their own projects in the context of the centenary. As part of the preparation process of the educational project, ten Flemish primary and secondary schools developed and implemented projects on several aspects of underwater cultural heritage to raise students’ awareness about the importance of the preservation of heritage and about the consequences of war. Some of their experiences are included in the teacher manual and will serve as an example of how certain schools have shaped their educational processes. Moreover, several Flemish partners collaborated on this local school initiative, which was coordinated by the United Nations Association Flanders Belgium



Figure 4. Students at work on Underwater Cultural Heritage during a Flemish school project © Istvan Leel - Ossy/UNA Flanders

(VVN). The partners include UNESCO Platform Vlaanderen, Peace Education services of the provinces West-Flanders and Antwerp, the Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ) and Canon Cultuurcel – the special cultural agency of the Flemish Department of Education.

The teacher manual has been compiled by UNESCO and

United Nations Association Flanders Belgium. The manual aims to inspire schools and invite them to thoroughly reflect on the issues at hand. It offers didactical suggestions and examples, which stimulate both the commemoration of the First World War through the example of underwater cultural heritage, and innovative reflections on peace, reconciliation, human rights and tolerance today. These different sections are illustrated through various didactical tips, options and examples (best practices). In addition, close attention has been paid to didactical limitations.

Peace and heritage education, based on underwater cultural heritage, then becomes a transversal or pan-curricular framework, which runs throughout the different classes and interdisciplinary organisation. The many cross-curricular links help us to turn children into citizens who are able to participate in democratic debates and are aware of social challenges. Not only in order to build up historical knowledge, but also in order to be able to better interpret contemporary problems and conflict areas – close to home, or even in school, or elsewhere – and place them in a human, social and historical context.

UNESCO proposes that schools and teaching institutions communicate the importance of heritage for the understanding of history, in the present case WWI heritage, in using the example of underwater cultural heritage. This can also serve to teach on the values of peace and reconciliation.

On the occasion of the launch of the teacher manual, UNESCO will make



Figure 5. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon rings the Peace Bell at the ceremony held at UN Headquarters marking the annual International Day of Peace © UN Photo

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