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The SHA Newsletter

Quarterly News on Historical Archaeology from Around the Globe

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Underwater - Worldwide

The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030) and Maritime Cultural Heritage: An Update (submitted by Athena Trakadas, National Museum of Denmark; co-chair, Ocean Decade Heritage Network; associate member, ACUA; athena.lynn.trakadas@natmus.dk): One of the main initiatives that is being undertaken by UNESCO to address the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development focuses on SDG 14: Life Below Water (UN n.d.). To this end, UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) has implemented the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030) (hereafter Decade). The Decade's Preparatory Phase (2018–2020) has just ended, with the Implementation Phase (2021–2030) to begin in January and the official launch later in the year.

The broadest aim of the Decade is to build scientific capacity and generate knowledge that will directly inform solutions to the aims of a range of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 14. The initiative promotes a common framework for supporting stakeholders in studying and assessing the health of the world's oceans and for building transformative partnerships, while fully recognizing that there needs to be a "paradigm shift" in how ocean science is obtained and knowledge is generated (UNESCO IOC 2020b:6).

Cultural heritage has been increasingly considered within the context of the Decade—in order to precipitate this proposed "paradigm shift," not only by informing and contributing to this knowledge base, but also by assisting in developing solutions for sustainable development (Figure 1).



During the Preparatory Phase, within the maritime cultural heritage community there have been various meetings, conferences, panels—and now in light of COVID-19, webinars—that have appraised the Decade and the role of cultural heritage in it. For example, one such panel, Implementing UCH into the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, held at the 2020 SHA meeting in Boston (chaired by Amanda Evans and Dave Ball), allowed for robust discussion of the Decade's key themes and their implication for cultural heritage practitioners (for a report on this panel by Chris Underwood, president of ICUCH, please see ODHN [2020a]; for other reports on meetings that address cultural heritage and the Decade, see ODHN [2020b]). Another SHA/ACUA panel will be held on 8 January 2021, at the upcoming virtual SHA meeting: Intentionally Transformational: Supporting the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development through a Conversation on Inclusion (chaired by Dave Ball, Amanda Evans, Athena Trakadas, and Antony Firth). These activities fortuitously answer the Call for Action "Our Ocean, Our Future," launched at the first UN Ocean Conference in 2017, whereby member states recognized that the ocean "forms an important part of our natural and cultural heritage" (UN General Assembly 2017:Annex §3), and called for stakeholders to "develop comprehensive strategies to raise awareness of the natural and cultural significance of the ocean" (Annex §13.d).

One of the focused actions has been the formation of the Ocean Decade Heritage Network (ODHN; www.oceandecadeheritage.org) at the First Global Planning Meeting of the Decade, hosted by the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen in May 2019. Since then, the network—now with ca. 200 members—has focused on raising awareness through outreach to and activities within the cultural heritage community about the Decade. ODHN has also coordinated a targeted global response from the community to improve the integration of cultural heritage within the marine sciences during the Decade's Preparatory and Implementation Phases. An important goal of ODHN has been to have the essential role of culture acknowledged in delivering sustainable development in our seas and oceans, noting in particular the relevance to the Decade of the UNESCO's Thematic Indicators for Culture in the 2030 Agenda (UNESCO WHC n.d.).

The importance of this goal was made clear during the Preparatory Phase, as ODHN, recognized as a Decade partner, was able to provide feedback on Decade documents such as Global Planning Meeting summaries and drafts



FIGURE 1. The Decade provides an opportunity to improve focus on the ocean's cultural heritage. Documenting a medieval shipwreck, Bar, Montenegro. (Photo © Montenegrin Maritime Archaeological Rescue Project.)

of the Implementation Plan, version 2.0 (July 2020) of which is being presented for ratification at the UN General Assembly in autumn of 2020. This plan incorporates several additions and listed challenges—including those that directly affect heritage sites (both natural and cultural). The Decade has been framed around achieving a series of Societal Outcomes by 2030 (six originally, with a seventh added in August 2020). Importantly, the Implementation Plan now highlights that "ocean science is broad: it encompasses natural and social science disciplines, local and indigenous knowledge" (UNESCO IOC 2020c:i) (Figure 2).

A Call for Decade Actions was made in October 2020, focusing on programs and pledges for funding (UNESCO IOC

2020a). Many more calls will be announced throughout the next 10 years, which gives members of the cultural heritage community plenty of time to shift from thinking “How can cultural heritage help deliver the Decade?” to “Without cultural heritage, how can you deliver the Decade?” (Trakadas et al. 2019:163).

The Implementation Plan Summary of the Decade highlights the importance of networks in addressing the Decade’s challenges and ultimately helping meet the Societal Outcomes. These can be found in Stakeholder Engagement platforms, be they regional, sectoral, or thematic, and are “Existing or new groups of ocean actors that work together to contribute to the Decade vision. Groups could convene on a geographic basis (e.g. at the regional level), for a specific theme (e.g. deep ocean, underwater cultural heritage), or for a particular stakeholder group (e.g. NGOs or private sector)” (UNESCO IOC 2020c:43).

ODHN arose out of a basic question: how can maritime cultural heritage be safeguarded as a key to reaching a sustainable future within the Decade’s framework? There are numerous ways in which to do this, and ODHN aims to inform and communicate to the cultural heritage community any suggested stakeholder actions. Networks consist of building alliances and sharing information, as there is strength and momentum in working toward a shared goal. Ultimately, the Decade is a vital opportunity to improve focus on the ocean’s cultural heritage that can be safeguarded in order to reach a sustainable future in the face of modernization or climate change. Networks allow for synergy, giving voice to how cultural heritage can inform the Decade’s “paradigm shift” of how ocean science is obtained and knowledge is generated.

Please visit the ODHN website, www.oceandecadeheritage.org or follow us on Twitter, [@DecadeHeritage](https://twitter.com/DecadeHeritage), to join the conversation and get involved.

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FIGURE 2. The Decade aims to include traditional and indigenous knowledge as a part of Ocean Sciences, of which artisanal fisheries are a part. Fishing boats at Ngomeni, Kenya. (Photo by A. Trakadas.)