



The UNESCO Training Manuals and the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands

- building capacity together for the protection of underwater cultural heritage

In 2012, the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) developed a training manual to be used during UNESCO's foundation courses on the protection and management of underwater cultural heritage. This first manual focused on Asia and the Pacific. The RCE, together with UNESCO, is currently developing a new training manual, adapted to Latin America and the Caribbean region, which will be published later this year. Ahead of the upcoming training manual, this article explores how these manuals developed and why they are valuable tools for building capacity in the field of underwater cultural heritage. It also provides information about the 2012 manual, since it constitutes an important instrument for those working with underwater cultural heritage not only in Asia and the Pacific, but around the world.



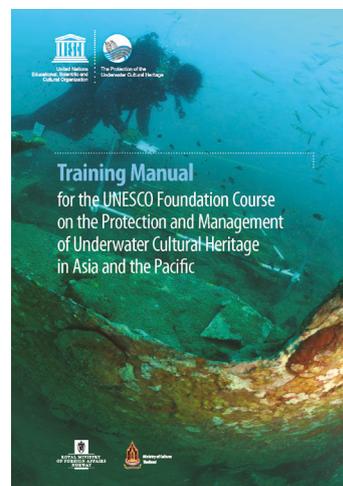
A dry survey practical session at the centre in Chanthaburi, Thailand (photo: Christopher J. Underwood).

From training courses to manual

The starting point of the UNESCO training courses and the 2012 manual can be seen as 2001, when the UNESCO General Assembly adopted the [Convention](#) on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage. This Convention proposes a legal framework for collective action against destruction, and it promotes the practice of underwater archaeology and public awareness for the need to protect underwater cultural heritage. Ratifying the Convention is beneficial to countries because it improves the protection of underwater cultural heritage through international cooperation. The Netherlands is [currently in the process of ratifying](#) the Convention, which will contribute to the development of integrated management approaches in different regions across the world and to the further exchange of knowledge in this field.

As a response to the Convention and its implementation, UNESCO Bangkok developed a regional capacity-building [project](#)

entitled "Safeguarding the Underwater Cultural Heritage in Asia and the Pacific". Within this project, several training courses were carried out between 2009 and 2011, which benefitted 70 experts from 16 countries amongst the Asia-Pacific Member States, as well as one expert from Kenya. The 2012 UNESCO training manual stemmed from these trainings, as it combines all of the curriculum material developed by the international expert trainers.



The cover of the 2012 UNESCO Training Manual (image: UAD/Arpakorn Kiewmas).

One key figure is Martijn Manders, programme leader and maritime expert at the RCE and lecturer at the University of Leiden (the Netherlands). He was one of the main contributors and organisers of the trainings and the development of the manual. Since its publication, the manual has further benefited training courses in Asia and the Pacific (for example, the training course in [Vietnam](#)).

The training manual: what and for who?

The 2012 "Training Manual for the UNESCO Foundation Course on the Protection and Management of Underwater Cultural Heritage

in Asia and the Pacific' combines all of the curriculum material developed by UNESCO's pool of international expert trainers. Edited by Martijn Manders and Chris Underwood, it is designed to be practical and user-friendly. Anyone can have access to the manual, since it is available for download on UNESCO's website. The accessibility of the manual has helped render this valuable knowledge more sustainable.

The manual has 18 units, which correspond to different yet interrelated fields of knowledge and expertise related to underwater cultural heritage, written by many experts in the field. Some units constitute general knowledge, meaning that they are useful to both students and professionals working with different resources and contexts around the world. These include the units about the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage; Management of Underwater Cultural Heritage; Desk-based Assessment; Data Management; Geographical Information Systems (GIS); Conservation and Finds Handling; and Archaeological Publication. Other topics are specifically focused on Asia and the Pacific, namely the units on Asian Ceramics and on Asian Shipbuilding Technology.

The manual includes also six appendixes. Some expand on certain units and others provide instruments that can be used during and after a training course, such as the appendix on How to Use Site Recorder and the Management Plan. One exceptionally useful tool is Appendix F, a Suggested Timetable for the Foundation Course, for those planning to develop new training courses and further disseminate the knowledge of this field of work.



Two trainees having a discussion underwater during the UNESCO foundation course in St Eustatius (photo: Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands).

From Asia and the Pacific to Latin America and the Caribbean

Although the UNESCO training courses were originally developed for Asia and the Pacific, in 2012, the first training took place in the Caribbean. This training, carried out in Jamaica, made use of the 2012 manual since, as mentioned above, much of its content can be applied to different contexts. It formed the basis for the later and second Caribbean training on St Eustatius, in 2014. 16 students from 12 countries, including St Eustatius, Saba and Curacao (the Netherlands), Haiti, Cuba, Venezuela, South Africa and Suriname participated in the 2014 course. During one month, they received training by six trainers on the protection and management of underwater cultural heritage. This course was made possible by the RCE, assisted by the University of Leiden, The NEXUS 1492 Project, UNESCO and the ICOMOS Committee on Underwater Cultural Heritage (ICUCH).



Photographing a newly discovered cannon during the St Eustatius UNESCO foundation course (photo: M. Manders).

This course included both practical and theoretical elements, namely, the mapping of the eighteenth century Dutch warehouses lying at a depth of up to five metres off the coast of St Eustatius, and thinking of ways of handling these remains in the future. This training course, much like previous ones, followed the UNESCO 2001 Convention and was based on the training manual developed in 2012. This earlier manual, focused on Asia and the Pacific, is now being adapted to Latin America and the Caribbean. It will be published later this year and it will also be translated into Spanish, to render it more accessible to professionals in the region.

Much like the earlier training manual, the knowledge developed and the experience gained during the UNESCO training courses that were carried out in Jamaica and St Eustatius are now also contributing to the development of the new manual. Once

published, it will become a guideline for future trainings, fieldwork and for setting up capacity building within a project. One such project that will benefit from the new training manual will be carried out in Cuba. Following an [agreement](#) signed between Cuba and the Netherlands, the two countries will be working together later this year in the research, management and protection of underwater cultural heritage in Cuban waters.



Underwater survey as a practical training during the St Eustatius foundation course (photo: Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands).

Capacity building and the Shared Cultural Heritage programme

Both the development of the manuals and the training courses are intrinsically linked to the RCE's goal to promote [capacity building](#) in the field of maritime and underwater cultural heritage, both in the Netherlands and abroad. This is a field relatively under-specialised in the Netherlands, as well as other countries. However, it is a field of expertise that the RCE has significantly developed over the years and which it aims to share in a sustainable way. Due to its specificities, underwater cultural heritage is often shared between countries, thus it constitutes one of the focuses of the Shared Cultural Heritage programme of the RCE. One of the aims of these training courses is to connect with different partners worldwide, both within and outside the Shared Cultural Heritage programme's network of partner countries.

Questions?

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