

Forum: Baltic Forum

Issue: Creation of underwater archaeology museum

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Introduction

Notwithstanding a global recession, people are still traveling and they are still visiting museums. Fortunately, museums have continued to mount serious exhibitions devoted to archaeology, and the public is showing its clear support. However, not enough attention has been drawn to the artifacts of underwater archeology in particular, therefore Baltic states have an opportunity to create a joint museum with variative exhibitions.

Creating such a museum should be considered thoroughly and carefully, since as a result it will have possible influence on the development of the whole Baltic region. Establishment of the underwater archaeology museum by joint efforts of all Baltic states will allow this museum to become one of the most popular and large scale projects within a region. As a scientific center, this museum will attract numerous researchers from different countries, to say nothing about the large increase in the tourist flow that must positively influence the economic growth of the region in general and some states in particular. This project will also work on the popularity and reputation of the region, attracting not only tourists and ordinary visitors, but international business companies and investors as well.

Definition of key terms

Underwater archaeology - Underwater archaeology deals with archaeological sites found below the surface of oceans, rivers, and lakes and on the foreshore. In addition to shipwrecks, underwater archaeologists study submerged aboriginal sites such as fish weirs and middens; remains of historic structures such as wharves, canal locks, and marine railways; sunken aircraft; and other submerged cultural heritage resources.

UNESCO - An agency of the United Nations charged with instituting and administering programs for cooperative, coordinated action by member states in education, science, and the arts.

Baltic sea region counties - Countries in the general area surrounding the Baltic Sea: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden.

Background information

Baltic Sea has existed for about 10 000 years, and there have been human settlements along its shores throughout this time – whose inhabitants have sailed, hunted and warred in the Baltic. Traces of these activities remain under the sea. Wrecks and other remains are preserved there. They make up a cultural heritage, extremely important for world history. Nowhere else in the world are there as many well preserved wooden wrecks as in the Baltic. So far, we know of about 20 000 remains of ships and smaller boats, but not all the wrecks have been discovered yet. Archaeologists believe there may be more than 100 000 of them. In 2016 local divers discovered a mid-nineteenth-century shipwreck in the Baltic Sea, off the coast of the Åland Islands. The well-preserved vessel still had its anchor and figurehead, along with hundreds of intact, unopened bottles. Researchers from Lund University have mapped an underwater site off the southern coast of Sweden, which age dates back as far as 9000 years. The archaeologists found stationary fish traps, and a 9,000-year-old pickax made of polished antler that may have been used to mount the traps. Vasa (or Wasa) is a Swedish warship built between 1626 and 1628. Vasa was raised from the Baltic sea in 1961. Excavation of the seabed and the interior of the ship yielded approximately 25,000 artifacts, including some 700 sculptural pieces that were once attached to the hull. These were only three examples of many discoveries made in recent years.

Major countries and organizations involved

All Baltic countries have interest in creation of an underwater archaeology facility. Great contribution into creation can be made by Institute of Baltic Region History and Archaeology (BRIAI), which is the scholarly research subdivision of Klaipėda University. It was established in 2003. The scholars of the Institute are involved in the research of changes in prehistoric and historic societies and cultures within the Baltic region by applying diverse scientific theories and methodologies. There is also a non-profit organization, called Baltic Underwater Explorers (BUE), which conducts its own search for sunken artefacts.

Relevant treaties and UN resolutions

All traces of human existence underwater which are one hundred years old or more are protected by the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage. This convention aims at preventing the destruction or loss of historic and cultural information and looting. It helps states parties to protect their underwater cultural heritage with an international legal framework.

Previous attempts to solve the issue:

So far there are only small, local underwater archaeology museums, such as Sjöhistoriska, Vasa Museum, in Stockholm, Sweden and in St.Petersburg, Russia (is due in 2022), as well as private collections.

Possible solutions:

There is a possibility to create a fund that will receive monetary resources from states interested in the establishment of such museum, as well as funds from private donors. This fund will not only finance the project, but also will organize its implementation. Work of this fund can be aimed at not only recovering and storing underwater archaeological findings, but also at raising awareness for this issue and drawing attention of people and tourists in particular to the astonishing historical heritage of the Baltic sea region.

When discussing the process of an underwater archaeology museum creation in more detail several aspects should be taken into consideration (not limited to):

- where will the museum be located?
- which structures as a scientific and touristic center the museum should consist of?
- how will the museum be functioning and how will its structure be managed and supervised?
- how to draw the attention of potential investors, scientists, and future tourists to the new museum?
- How the infrastructure surrounding the future museum and scientific center should be organized and developed?
- How to collect and exhibit future artifact collections?

Useful and Reliable Sources

<https://en.unesco.org/>

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Baltic-Sea>

<http://balticmuseums.ning.com/>