Strategic Context: Belgium’s maritime archaeological challenges

Dredging and Port Construction, PIANC workshop, Brussels, 20th November 2013

Photo Etienne Rathé, maritieme toegang

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A small but a very busy zone (deserving 5 harbours): a lot of activities: dredging, aggregate extraction, dumping dredged materials from harbour channels, infrastructural works on the coast to protect the country to the millennial storm surge – seen in the context of the commitment to take care of the UCH in that same zone.

Three major challenges
- A very complex legal situation
- Recent development of maritime archaeology
- The lack of awareness of UCH
State structure in Belgium and its relation to archaeology

- Belgium is a federal state consisting of three regions and three communities.
- Regions are competent for territorial issues/affairs, Communities for personal affairs/issues.
- Archaeology is a territorial issue thus competence of the regions, in relation to musea and education however, archaeology is a matter of the communities.
- Flanders is the only region with a coastline.
- North Sea is not a part of the regions nor of the communities. The Federal government has territorial authority in the territorial waters and on the BCS but has no material competence on archaeology: a residual competence.
Many areas with different regime for UCH

1. Rivers and other inland waters: each region has its own archaeological legislation: Flanders-Brussels-Wallonia-German speaking community
2. North Sea
   - intertidal part = Flanders
   - territorial sea
   - Belgian continental shelf/EEZ

A lot of complexity for a small sea territory: only 3500 km²

On 05.08.2013 Belgium ratified on behalf of the regions and communities the UNESCO Convention for the protection of the UCH as the 45th memberstate of UNESCO to do so: a strong statement
Second challenge: Recent development of maritime/underwater archaeology in Belgium but also in the world (compared to archaeology on land)

- Archaeological interest in the Belgian part of the North Sea started in 2003
- In 2006 we published an online database of UCH in the North Sea (www.maritime-archaeology.be)
- We participated to several European projects (Planarch, Machu, Atlas of the 2 Seas)
- 2009: start of the project focused on the medieval cog wrecks found during extension works for the harbour of Antwerp
- 2013: start of the SeArch project

Basic statement: recent development: thus limited knowledge on the archaeology at sea
Worldwide: underwater archaeology mainly post WWII, we know far more about archaeology on land compared to archaeology at sea
Third major challenge: people are in general unaware of the archaeological potential of the sea: public at large but the heritage professional as well

Not a single person thinks about heritage in relation to the sea
Challenges for UCH within the Belgian part of the North Sea

Three ways of dealing with these challenges

1. Implementation of ‘so-called’ Wreck Law
2. Maritime Spatial Planning
3. SEARCH-project
Archaeological heritage in the North Sea

Development of an efficient assessment methodology and approach towards a sustainable management policy and legal framework in Belgium.

2013 - 2016

Agency for Innovation by Science and Technology
Starting point: balancing the economic need for major projects with the commitment to implement the UNESCO-convention.

**Three Main objectives**

1) **Technology / Methodology**
   To develop a reliable survey methodology based on geophysical and remote sensing techniques that allows accurate and cost-effective evaluation of the archaeological potential of marine areas under development (offshore, nearshore, and intertidal areas) which can be made available to the maritime industry and which should ideally be shipshape.

2) **Management / Policy**
   To prepare (based on the methodology) a correct implementation of the commitments with regard to UCH and work out comprehensive proposals for a transparent and sustainable management policy and for the further development and implementation of a legal framework related to UCH in Belgium. This legislative framework should protect the marine historic environment but at the same time allow the necessary marine exploitation.

3) **Outreach / Communication**
   To offer practical guidance towards the stakeholders (marine industry, fisheries, government agencies, harbor authorities, ...), on how to implement the new methodology and management approach, and to increase the general awareness with regards to UCH.
Project Partners
- UNIVERSITEIT GENT
- erf-goed
- VLIZ
- Deltares

Subcontractors
- Innomar
- RLICC

Stakeholders & Advisory committees
- Government agencies
- Marine Industry (dredging, aggregates, renewable energy...)
- Fisheries
- Harbour authorities
- Scientific world
- Public/social sector
- Maritime heritage experts from abroad (English Heritage, RCE,...)
Results so far for Technology/Methodology

Basic idea: work with testsites and find a way to deal with the unknown

-Assessment of the existing geophysical & remote sensing technology (offshore + intertidal) with the idea of testing all these available technologies on areas which are maximally known archaeologically

-Study and gathering of the archaeological & geological data and if necessary acquire new information where possible

-Selection of the best suited test sites

-Do the experimental survey work
Selecting test sites

Criteria:
- Variation in depth
- Sediments types
- Expected archaeology/materials
- Available ground-truth

2 offshore sites
2 intertidal sites
Archaeological features related to the sunken 13-14th century fishing settlement and to medieval and probably also Roman peat extraction
Survey October 2013,

Ostend valley (offshore)

- Wide range of acoustic sources and receivers (single- & multichannel)
- Where possible simultaneously (‘one-sweep survey’),
- Areas with Gas + gas-free areas
- Emphasis on advanced (‘smart’) processing

Winter 2013-2014

Nearshore /Intertidal research with focus on

- Integration LIDAR and bathymetry
- S-waves and surface waves (in areas with gas-rich sediments)

Maps from PhD Mathys M.
2008-02009
Results so far for Management/Policy/legal situation

Basic idea: build the management regime and the legal framework on the new technological methodology

-large scale consultation of all stakeholders: at the start of the project: December 2012-January 2013.
-Integration of UCH protection into Belgian Marine Spatial Planning
-Find Protocols based on experiences abroad adapted to local situation/context:

Aggregate extraction: international archaeological approach is needed: a lot of gravel commercialized in Belgium is coming from UK waters e.g. Sand extraction with sieving at sea is a problematic activity seen from an archaeological perspective
Protocols for archaeological discoveries
Results so far for Outreach

- Increase general awareness regarding the UCH (Continuous dissemination)

  - Lectures, project leaflets, poster, website....
  - Visiting vessels, wharves, harbours...
  - ...

Very positive response of the stakeholders: lack of awareness is a main problem: out of mind is out of heart
Implementation of the so-called ‘Wreck-law’ of 2007

- This law of 2007 was only dealing with wrecks and wreck-parts occurring in the Belgian territorial waters

- The new law (probably coming into effect in 2014) will deal with all types of UCH: ‘law on the protection of cultural heritage underwater’ in the territorial waters but thanks to the ratification of the UNESCO-convention also beyond in the EEZ and BCS. Finds of UCH will have to be reported in a system similar to the UK Receiver of wrecks. The Belgian ‘receiver of cultural heritage’ however will only deal with UCH.

- By implementing this law Belgium is already partly implementing the UNESCO-convention mostly for activities directed at UCH and for UCH found at sea.
Spatial planning at sea

The federal government is also preparing a law on the spatial planning of our part of the North Sea. UCH is involved as a partner in the preparations of this law meaning that UCH is taken into account.

I’m optimistic: stakeholders already approached are very collaborative and interested