

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

### A PHOENICIAN UNDERWATER HERITAGE TRAIL IN ISLA GROSA (MURCIA), SPAIN

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In recent years, the Region of Murcia has promoted new tourism models related to heritage and the sea. However, despite the richness of its maritime history and heritage, it has not done so in a complementary manner. The Mar Menor - La Manga area has only boosted the maritime aspect in relation to nautical activities, leaving their heritage relegated to a second place.

Cultural tourism can become an important ally when it comes to diversifying the tourist offer, providing “added value or differentiation in already developed or mature tourist destinations” (Toselli, 2006) and breaking with the seasonality that characterizes the model based on the binomial of sun and beach, so widespread in the Mediterranean. However, for cultural tourism to meet these expectations, certain conditions are imperative such as adequate planning, rigorous interpretative elements, cooperation between the different agents involved or respect and protection of resources. Otherwise, the results can be detrimental both to the visitor and host community and to heritage assets (which are not regenerative). All of these issues are of particular importance when we talk about underwater cultural heritage (UCH) since its location, environment and conditions, entail significant limitations.

The Mar Menor area and, more specifically, La Manga, is the first touristic beach destination in the region. However, or perhaps because of that, this is one of the most damaged areas as a result of malpractice, not only related to tourism, but also in general management. The destruction of ecosystems and other environmental problems are a reality that has appeared in the local and national newspapers, affecting the visitor when choosing a destination, and creating discomfort among the local population before the resentment of their natural, social, identitarian, tourist and economic resources.

The region is tremendously varied in patrimonial sites and chronologies, as a result of a geographic microregionalization that has propitiated landscapes, populations, and diverse cultural traditions. Cabo de Palos is considered one of the ten most interesting diving destinations in the world not only because of the quality of its waters and its natural environment but also because of the numerous sunken ships that rest on its bottoms: at

least fifty shipwrecks of modern ships (and many other remains of ancient times). This is one of its main attractions as these wrecks are located at different depths, but most of them are concentrated in the same area. Not in vain this village of about 1000 inhabitants concentrates almost a dozen diving centers. Historic Shipwrecks are therefore a strong tourist claim and wrecks are present not only in the offer of diving centers but also in general tourist promotion. Unfortunately, educational resources are rarely included.

Although a “wreck tourism” is currently active, it cannot be considered a type of cultural tourism as it does not involve real value and the information received by divers, their interaction with the wrecks and the interpretation process are left to the discretion of the dive centers.

In recent years and following the guidelines of the UNESCO Convention of 2001 for the protection of the UCH, the idea of in situ conservation is gaining more and more prominence among the underwater archaeologists and policy makers, not only due to conservation issues, but also because it has demonstrated great potential in educating and raising public awareness about the fragility and importance of UCH.

Bearing in mind these experiences and the reflections gathered previously, the Isla Grosa Project (an initiative of the Association of Friends of the National Museum of Underwater Archaeology, ARQVA, and the company ARQUEOMAR), was launched in a privileged environment, as a pilot project aiming to enhance the underwater cultural heritage of the area, increase participation and social return, to promote direct involvement of the Region’s diving centers, raising the awareness of recreational divers and improving their education in the guidelines for responsible diving in heritage environments (Pérez-Reverte and Cerezo Andreo, 2019).

The project covered three mutually reinforcing areas: an underwater archaeology research project, the creation of a “field school” within that research framework, and the development of an underwater cultural trail.

In view of the general lack of public studies related to the profile of divers and in order to evaluate training deficiencies and adapt educational tools for the purpose of this project, an analysis of this profile was carried out through a series of surveys in the diving centers of the region. With the data collected, a profile was drawn of the average diver in the area, and it was clearly unbalanced: we faced a diver with a high level of interest, already diving in wrecks and areas with archaeological remains, but without the desirable training in the ethical guidelines for responsible diving in heritage environments, or other related recommended knowledge.

However, the survey also reflected positive data: together with the high degree of interest of divers, 99% of them were receptive to receiving more information from their dive centers and a 95% believed that this type of activities (diving and training) should be carried out together with an underwater archaeologist.

The route was located at the foot of Bajo de la Campana (Isla Grosa) in the Phoenician wreck excavated by J. Pinedo and M. Polzer between 2007 and 2011, with the collaboration of the INA (Institute of Nautical Archeology) (USA) and the ARQVA Museum. The activity was originally planned as an extension of the ARQVA Museum, where the original materials from the excavation of the site are exhibited. The first interventions for

the adequacy of the site and the installation of didactic resources and underwater signaling were developed during the month of June 2014.

Regarding educational training, before the immersion and still on land, the divers received a brief talk from the archaeologist-guide explaining to them what they were going to visit, the importance of Underwater Archaeology as a research discipline, as well as the basic rules of diving in wrecks and in archaeological sites elaborated by UNESCO. For this purpose, videos and other audiovisual resources were used. In addition, educational brochures were designed to be permanently available in the centers. After the formative talk, we proceeded to embark. During the approximate 40 minutes of navigation from the port to the surroundings of the Bajo de la Campana, the archaeologist-guide continued his work putting in context the site not only in Antiquity but until our days, explaining to the divers the patrimonial wealth of the zone, the meaning of the toponymy of the coastal accidents and, to sum up, the Maritime History of the space in which they were and the culture associated with it.

The immersion was carried out following a route marked on the seabed with a guide line, with pre-established stops. Explanatory panels with reproductions of pieces, images of the works or explanations of the techniques of Underwater Archaeology were fixed in the points of interest. Thus, along the route, the visitor could see from where and how some of the objects exhibited in the museum had been extracted and, at the same time, thanks to the support of interpretative tools, knew the importance of Underwater Archaeology and the preservation of heritage. Given the absence of archaeological remains and with the aforementioned didactic objective, the excavation that had been carried out between 2007 and 2011, was faithfully recreated in its different phases. In this way, during the tour the recreation of different excavation zones was visited, as well as a prospecting zone; the different techniques applied in the archaeological methodology could be observed and, in addition, the visitor was allowed to interact with the tools of this science (Pérez-Reverte and Cerezo Andreo, 2019). In short, the aim was to offer the visitor an positive experience and responsible relationship with the underwater cultural heritage.

The dive lasted approximately 50 minutes. Once finished, and on the way back, after the experience, the archaeologist-guide had a relaxed conversation with the visitors in which doubts were clarified offering more detail where required. It was really in this return navigation, after the visit, when the divers were more curious and participative, with questions not only about the site but also about Maritime History, Archaeology, the wrecks, and many other issues; where, from our perspective, this relationship between the interpreter-intermediary and society was definitively materialized, consolidating the objectives of the project.

Finally, the divers were invited to visit the ARQVA Museum and write an email to the project address indicating their impressions on the exhibition. 87% of the divers visited the ARQVA Museum in the following days. The feedback from these e-mails was very positive; the materials were placed in a unitary context despite being in different showcases and a sort of appropriation and individualization of the pieces was observed. For visitors, they ceased to be “generic” archaeological objects to become “specific” archaeological objects: they knew them (and therefore recognized them), they knew their

origin, their peculiarities, their individual and collective history. They had appropriated their cultural and heritage value.

With the aim of expanding the social return of the project, during the summer of 2014 complementary activities were developed for non divers such as children's workshops, guided tours on land and informative talks in different hotels and cultural centers.

Despite the lack of visible archaeological remains, the experience was highly valued by visitors. This demonstrates the importance of a proper interpretation process and proper planning. On the other hand, the project counted on the varied participation of companies, associations, universities, town councils and other entities, demonstrating that there is a genuine interest in facilitating and promoting these lines of work in the local community and in the region itself.

As we have seen, the area of La Manga-Mar Menor has great potential with remains and sites from different periods both on land and underwater. The enhancement of this heritage and the maritime culture that gives it context, could serve not only to diversify the tourist offer but also to enhance the protection and survival of these fragments of history.