Interreg

Co-funded by the European Union

Central Baltic Programme

UCL-Baltic

Project activity 1.2. «Workshops for Methodology Development»

Summary of workshops

Republic of Estonia
National Heritage Board

National Heritage Board of Latvia

Ålands landskapsregering

Objective

As part of the UCL-Baltic project, three workshops were organised to develop a harmonised methodology and gather useful information from different countries and professional sectors. All workshops were organised as face-to-face events to ensure direct dialogue and productive discussions. Following the workshops, information and participant feedback were exchanged.

The first workshop took place in Mariehamn, Åland Islands, and brought together professionals from most of the Baltic Sea countries and Norway. The other two events were national workshops, one in Tallinn, Estonia, and the other in Jūrmala, Latvia.

Individual summaries of each workshop are provided below.

UCL-Baltic is a project funded by the Interreg Central Baltic Programme and carried out by the Estonian and Latvian National Heritage Boards and the Åland Government's Cultural Department. The project aims to develop a standardised methodology for assessing, classifying and managing underwater cultural landscapes (UCLs) in the Baltic Sea and beyond.
Project duration: May 2025 – October 2026.
Find out more at: https://centralbaltic.eu/project/ucl-baltic/

Åland workshop

«Working with underwater cultural landscapes»

26th-27th November 2025, Ålands Parliament building (Självstyrelsegården), 37 Strandgatan, Mariehamn

Programme

Wednesday, 26 November

Welcome and round of introductions

PRESENTATIONS:

Sallamaria Tikkanen, Finnish Heritage Agency: *Opening the underwater landscape – experiences from Finland*

Petra Stråkendal, Swedish National Heritage Board: *Underwater Cultural Landscape - a Swedish perspective*

Thomas Bjørkeland, Stavanger Maritime Museum: Underwater Cultural Heritage in Norway - *Meeting challenges through best practice, collaboration, and awareness*

Alar Rosentau, Institute of Ecology and Earth Sciences, University of Tartu, Estonia: *Introducing the European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet)*

DISCUSION - Framing the concept

Day summary

Visit to Ålands Maritime Museum and Dinner

Thursday, 27 November

CASE STUDIES:

Riikka Tevali, curator maritime archaeology, Åland Islands

Kaspars Markus Molls, maritime archaeologist, Latvia

Alar Rosentau, University of Tartu, Estonia

DISCUSSION - Methods and criteria

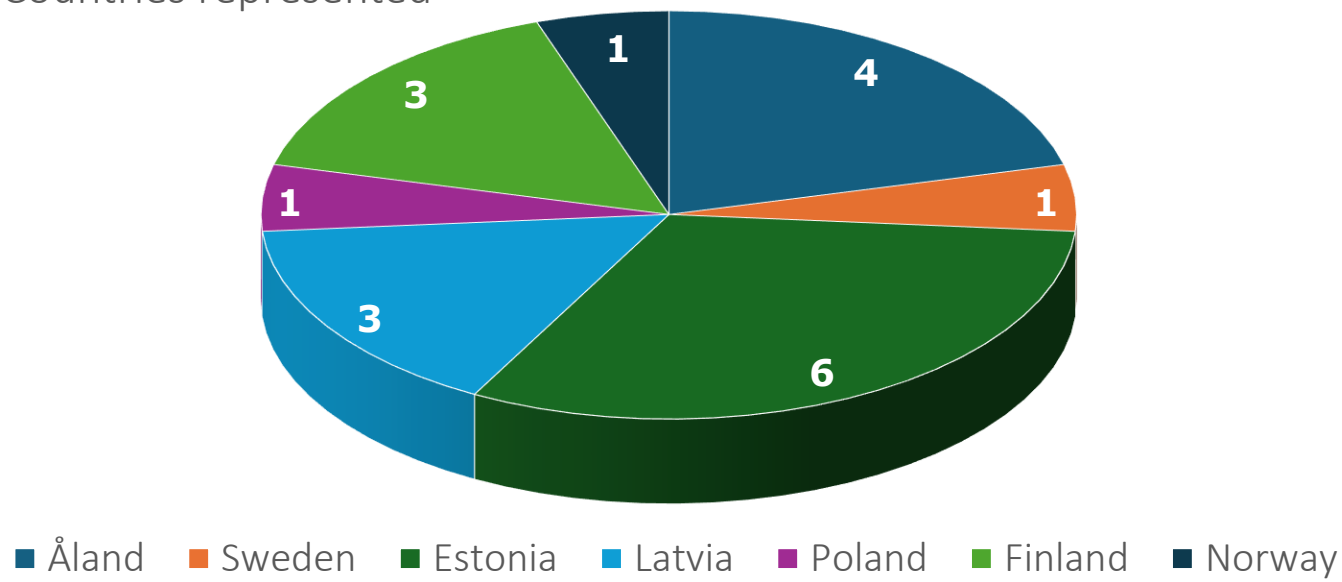
Joint summary of results

The workshop was attended by 19 experts from various maritime sectors, including archaeologists, maritime spatial planners, geologists and museum specialists. The event brought together people from both the public and private sectors, each with a distinct background in the field.

Participants of the workshop at the end of the 2nd day

Photo: M. Asmer

Countries represented



Presentations

- S. Tikkanen outlined how Finland has developed the UCL concept through the creation of underwater parks, maritime spatial planning and the BalticRIM project. Later discussions highlighted the challenges posed by military restrictions on underwater mapping and the increasing impact of the offshore energy industry.
- P. Stråkendal presented Sweden's perspective, emphasising that despite there being thousands of known and unknown wrecks, only a small part of Swedish waters has been mapped. She stressed the need to integrate UCL into environmental assessments, to define underwater landscapes more broadly, and to improve cooperation with the development and legal sectors.
- T. Bjørkeland described Norway's UCH management system, the current reforms to include the Exclusive Economic Zone, and the ongoing projects involving the development of technical methods to document submerged cultural landscapes in collaboration with technology companies.
- A. Rosentau introduced EMODnet, a European marine data network that compiles seabed, geological and environmental information. This information may eventually include cultural heritage and predictive modelling for submerged landscapes.
- R. Tevali presented a case study of Granhamn, a maritime landscape comprising underwater and coastal archaeological remains, such as wrecks, campsites and artefacts associated with the Battle of Granhamn. The study emphasised the value of historical sources and shoreline uplift analysis, as well as the challenges posed by fish industry activity and poor visibility.
- K. M. Molls discussed Latvia's Cape Kolka, where shifting sands make it difficult to identify the numerous shipwrecks reported there, and the Daugava–Lielupe coastal area, where recent surveys have revealed a large concentration of shipwrecks, whose parts are being washed ashore.
- A. Rosentau presented research from Estonia's Pärnu Bay, where a submerged prehistoric forest and riverbed suggest the presence of a potential prehistoric cultural landscape, despite the absence of artefacts.
- Common themes across all presentations included interdisciplinary collaboration, technological innovation, data accessibility, and balancing heritage protection with renewable energy expansion.

Discussion and Results: Framing the Concept

Participants were divided into 3 discussion groups and later presented their results

What is an “underwater cultural landscape”?

- The Baltic Sea: a shared landscape.
- 'Culture', 'sea', 'land', submerged areas, and so on.
- It is important to define the terminology used in specific cases. The overall definition can be narrowed down by defining spatial structures.
- The components of a landscape are usually visible.

Components: wrecks, harbours, infrastructures, natural elements, sea routes

- The impact of a component on the landscape is determined by its value.
- Activities such as hunting and fishing, as well as livelihoods, are also part of UCL.
- Commercially, the value of a landscape is determined by how much money is available for its preservation.
- Human impact defines the elements of the landscape.
- Components can change over time due to human impact.

Discussion of values (historical, scientific, community, aesthetic, economic)

- Value should not be determined by age.
- Personal experience plays a part in determining value for an individual.
- All landscapes are affected by humans, and scientific, environmental and aesthetic values can help to narrow down the area in question.
- Not all values are essential for an area to be considered a UCL.
- A single wreck does not constitute a landscape; it is the context that gives an area value.
- Tourism provides an opportunity to promote the protection of UCLs to politicians and raise awareness of their value.
- Risk assessment is paramount: environmentally hazardous elements should be removed, even if they have historical value.

Discussion and Results: Methods and Criteria

How to map and assess cultural landscapes?

- Answer the question: why? What is the purpose of the assessment?
- Based on the available funding and environment, choose applicable technology and methods.
- Do a desktop study first, using public databases, archival data, satellite images, LIDAR maps, etc.

How to present benefits of underwater cultural landscapes to the planning community and users of marine areas?

- Talk to society, local communities and authorities at different levels and educate them.
- Some legal documents can be used as a basis for developing a protected area.
- Present the values and practical benefits, such as museums, parks and articles.
- Consider the restrictions and look for compromises.

How to implement UCL in national registries? Should it be done?

- It should be done. The UCL should also be incorporated into the MSP.
- Use existing protected landscapes and add a layer of cultural heritage.
- Protect a site as a cultural monument, but detailed research is needed to justify this.
- An UCL as a protected monument could not be justified; it is already difficult to argue for buffer zones.

Which criteria are suitable for determining significance (archaeological, natural, landscape values)?

- Use existing international and foreign criteria and adapt them for your own purposes.
- All aspects (cultural, environmental factors, tourism) should be taken into consideration.
- Criteria should be cross-sectoral to better understand the significance of a landscape.

Should regional or international standards be applied?

- Yes, but always consider national standards.
- Pan-Baltic regional approach.
- International cooperation is important for UCL protection and management in the EEZ.
- Guidelines are useful for planning purposes, but standards are strictly regulated and should also be developed.

Discussion: methods and criteria
Photo: M. Asmer

Estonian workshop

«Underwater Landscapes Workshop»

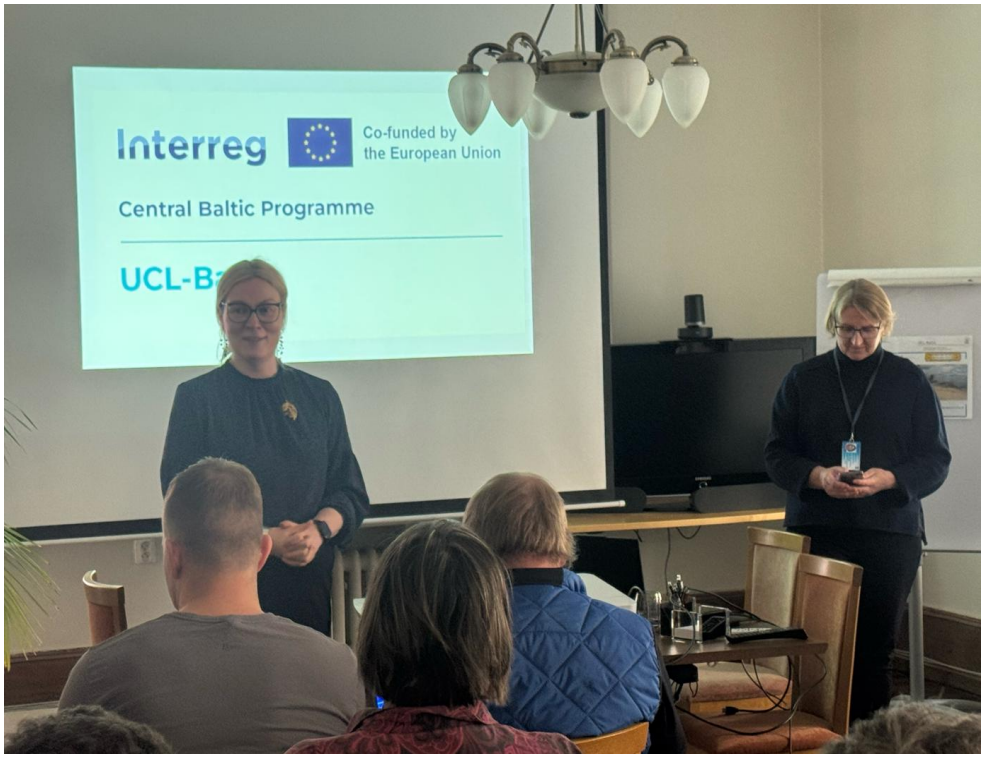
11th March 2026, Muinsuskaitseamet – Pikk 2, Tallinn

Programme

Arrival and registration
Workshop session – presentations

- Alar Rosentau: *Submerged Holocene landscapes on the seabed of Pärnu Bay*
- Sten Suuroja: *Seabed landscapes*
- Maili Roio: *Archaeological remains on the seabed*

Stretch and lunch break
Workshop session - Discussion on valuable underwater landscapes



Marilin Mihkelson, Director General of the Estonian National Heritage Board, greeting the participants of the workshop. Photo: M. Asmer

Summary and Presentations

The central aim of the workshop was to address underwater landscapes as complex objects of study that combine geological, ecological, and cultural heritage values. The workshop brought together experts from various fields (archaeology, geology, spatial planning, nature conservation, etc.) to discuss how these values can be assessed and integrated into spatial planning.

The focus of the workshop was the question of how to approach underwater landscapes as spatial wholes, as carriers of multiple value systems, and as a basis for planning decisions.

The workshop was attended by 31 participants of different sectors.

Presentations and Theoretical Framework

The presentations emphasized that underwater landscapes are not only natural phenomena but also contain important cultural and historical information (e.g. shipwrecks, traces of human activity). Therefore, their study requires an interdisciplinary approach.

Case study analiysis and discussion

Case Study for Group Work: Neugrund Meteorite Crater in the Gulf of Finland

The group work was based on the Neugrund meteorite crater area, treated as an intersection of multiple values:

- Geological value
  - a unique meteorite crater of international importance
  - well-preserved crater structure
  - significant information about early Cambrian processes
- Nature conservation value
  - nature reserve established in 2023
  - important bird species and habitats
  - protection of reefs and marine life
- Cultural heritage
  - two protected shipwrecks: the armored ship *Schleswig-Holstein* and a well-preserved 18th-century sailing shipwreck
  - archaeological research potential
- Planning context
  - the area is also used as a military training area and for recreation
  - in the county spatial plan, the Neugrund shoal includes marking potential viewing points on the coasts of Osmussaar and Nõva. However, the section “General principles for preserving valuable natural and cultural landscapes” only addresses land-based activities. No general principles are defined specifically for Neugrund.

Neugrund thus served as an example where different values may both overlap and conflict.

Group Work

Participants were divided into four groups, each using a different approach.

Group 1. Classical expert assessment

The focus was on which values are primary, how to weigh them, and whether expert assessment is a suitable tool.

Discussed:

- values: geological, archaeological, ecological, socio-economic (fisher, resident), intangible cultural heritage, tourism
- the role and composition of experts
- ensuring objectivity and reliability (expert competence, methodology, inclusion of all values)
- input for marine spatial planning (guidelines depending on activities)
- challenges when no shared value is found (conflicts between values)

Conclusions:

- expert assessment enables flexible and context-based analysis
- categorization is important (e.g. uniqueness, compensability, compromise in use, integrity/proportionality)
- results depend strongly on the selected experts
- sufficient baseline data is critical

Group 2. Spatial planning perspective

The area was treated as a planning object.

Focus:

- land/sea use functions (protection, research, tourism) – what can be defined through planning?
- threats (e.g. development activities)
- spatial boundaries and regulations

Conclusions:

- values must be translated into concrete planning decisions
- balancing different uses is essential
- clear spatial guidelines and different levels of protection are needed

Group 3. Criteria-based assessment

Method: structured evaluation using a scoring system.

Discussed:

- selection of criteria (e.g. rarity, preservation)
- scoring scale (1–3 considered sufficient)
- advantages and limitations of quantification

Conclusions:

- increases transparency
- allows comparison between areas
- risk of oversimplification and subjectivity in defining criteria

Group 4. Narrative / value-based approach

Method: meaning- and value-based interpretation.

Focus:

- why the area is important and for whom
- how to communicate value
- what is the “story” of the area

Conclusions:

- narratives help make values understandable to the public
- important for tourism and awareness
- risk of subjectivity and difficulty linking to concrete decisions

Participants of the Tallinn workshop. Photo: M. Asmer

Conclusions

Key Cross-cutting Themes and Challenges

- **Multiplicity of values**
  Underwater landscapes simultaneously contain natural, cultural, scientific, and economic values. Balancing them is complex.
- **Limited data**
  All groups highlighted insufficient baseline data and uncertainty in decision-making.
- **Objectivity**
  Transparency of methods, diversity of experts, and clear criteria are essential.
- **Planning application**
  The main challenge is translating values into concrete spatial decisions and integrating underwater landscapes into planning.

Conclusions and General Observations

Addressing underwater landscapes requires an integrated and multi-level approach. No single method (expert assessment, criteria-based, spatial planning, or narrative) is sufficient on its own.

Key conclusions:

- a combined assessment model is needed, integrating quantitative (criteria), qualitative (expert assessment), spatial (planning), and communicative (narrative) approaches
- underwater landscapes must be more clearly integrated into marine spatial planning, including protection regimes, usage rules, spatial boundaries, and decision criteria
- there is a need to develop unified evaluation criteria, better baseline data, and interdisciplinary cooperation
- the narrative dimension is important for raising awareness and supporting value interpretation and protection

The workshop confirmed that underwater landscapes are complex and multi-layered objects whose evaluation requires both scientific analysis and societal interpretation. The Neugrund case clearly highlighted the need to integrate nature conservation, cultural heritage, and spatial planning into a unified decision-making framework.
The main contribution of the workshop lies in deepening the understanding that underwater landscapes are not only objects of research but also strategic spatial resources, whose informed and balanced use is a key issue for future planning.

Latvian workshop

«Underwater Cultural Landscapes: Current Problems and Approaches to Effective Management»

27th March 2026, Jūrmala Museum, Tirgoņu iela 29, Jūrmala

Programme

Arrival and registration

Opening the workshop by S. Zirne

Presentations:

- Kaspars Markus Molls, National Heritage Board of Latvia: *UCL-Baltic project and the underwater cultural landscapes of the Baltic sea*
- Edijs Breijers, University of Latvia Faculty of Science and Technology: *The evolution of the Baltic Sea basin along the Latvian coast*
- Ilze Sabule, Nature conservation agency, project LIFE REEF: *The creation, protection and management of the marine protected area network*
- Ieva Bārda, Latvian Institute of Aquatic Ecology: *Geological structure identification and research in the Kurzemes region*
- Toms Skadiņš, Ministry of Smart Administration and Regional Developement: *Maritime spatial plan*

Coffee break

Discussion and introduction to the Underwater Cultural Landscape Assessment Form

S. Zirne addressing the participants. Photo by: L. Zonne-Zumberga

Presentations

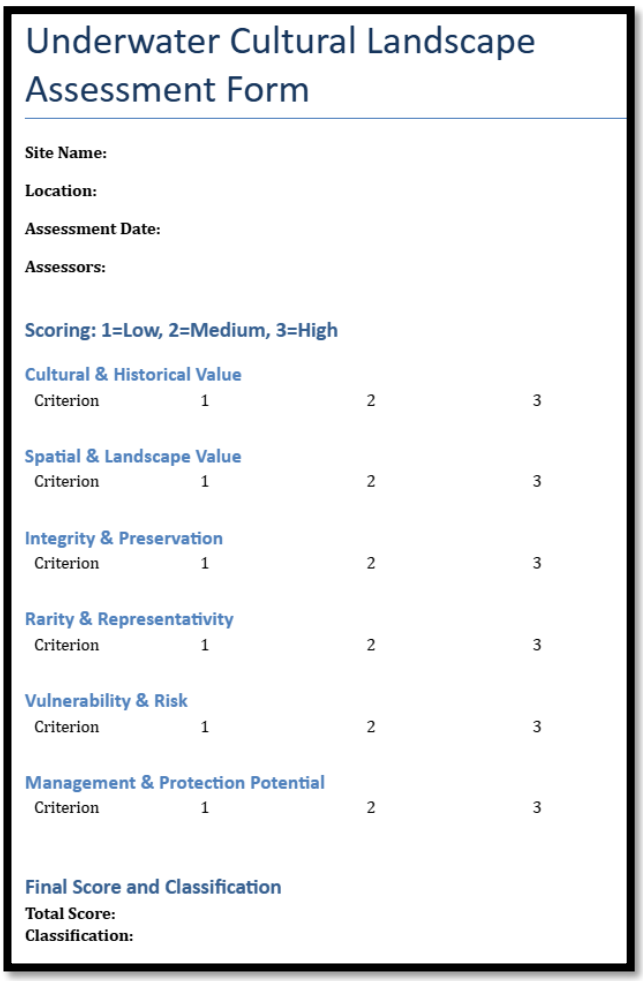
- K. M. Molls introduced the UCL-Baltic project. He highlighted the lack of unified definitions in the field and the limited amount of underwater data. He also emphasised the importance of cross-border cooperation and the need to view underwater heritage in connection with natural and coastal environments.
- E. Breijers examined the geological development of the Baltic Sea basin along the Latvian coastline, with a focus on glacial processes, changing sea levels and shoreline evolution. The presentation emphasised that the Baltic region is heterogeneous and requires a coordinated management approach and further large-scale mapping.
- I. Sabule presented the LIFE REFF project and Latvia's network of marine protected areas. The project focuses on mapping marine habitats and biodiversity, and also contributes to the protection of underwater cultural heritage by including wreck databases, limiting the offshore industry, and creating management plans that integrate both natural and cultural values.
- I. Bārda introduced the 'Geosites' project, which documents the geological heritage of Latvia and Lithuania through surveys, categorisation criteria and interactive mapping. The research included detailed underwater mapping and 3D modelling of geological formations, such as the Alku Shallow.
- T. Skadiņš described Latvia's maritime spatial planning system as a long-term framework that balances sustainable marine use, public interests and sectoral cooperation. He emphasised the need for updated data on wrecks, underwater landscapes and cultural heritage values in future planning documents.

Discussion and introduction to the Underwater Cultural Landscape Assessment Form

The draft of the UCL assessment form was presented to the workshop participants, alongside examples corresponding to different landscape types.

The presented case studies:

- A 16-point score is held by Cape Kolka, which includes shipwrecks, historical shipping routes, intangible heritage, military significance, and nature protected areas, amongst other features. It is a shared landscape between Latvia and Estonia.
- Cape Mērsrags has a score of 13 points, defined by its geographical features, natural harbour and shipbuilding traditions.
- The Coast of Mietrags has a score of 10 and consists mainly of historical shipwrecks that were used for military training, but its significance is enhanced by its natural features.
- The Coast of Liepupe has a score of 7, as there are no known UCH sites, but the area has a history of shipbuilding traditions and fishing.



Underwater Cultural Landscape Assessment Form

Site Name:

Location:

Assessment Date:

Assessors:

Scoring: 1=Low, 2=Medium, 3=High

Cultural & Historical Value

Criterion	1	2	3

Spatial & Landscape Value

Criterion	1	2	3

Integrity & Preservation

Criterion	1	2	3

Rarity & Representativity

Criterion	1	2	3

Vulnerability & Risk

Criterion	1	2	3

Management & Protection Potential

Criterion	1	2	3

Final Score and Classification

Total Score:

Classification:

UCL Assessment form draft, that was presented at the workshop

Discussion: improving UCL assesment

The participants were divided into three thematic groups based on their professional expertise. Some guiding points were presented to inform the discussions.

Nature experts:

- The chronological framework of the underwater cultural landscape must be defined, and how values are evaluated in different territorial contexts must be clarified.
- All identified landscape values must be incorporated into the methodology, and the criteria of 'rarity' and 'representation' require clearer definitions.
- Landscapes and wrecks should be treated as broader spatial and vertical systems connected to coastal heritage, not as point objects.
- Assessments must involve multiple specialists and include an 'uncertainty' section reflecting data reliability and expert objectivity.

Spatial planners:

- The methodology shows promise, but clearer scoring criteria are required, as well as alignment with existing coastal landscape assessment systems.
- There should be greater emphasis on nature protection, protected areas and risk assessment, including threats from the military and chemicals.
- The importance of interdisciplinary cooperation and adapting the European-level methodology to Latvian planning needs was also emphasised.
- Accessibility, tourism potential, diving conditions, safety and digital tools, such as digital twins, were also identified as relevant aspects of landscape evaluation and protection.

Cultural heritage specialists and public representatives:

- Clearer definitions of threats and assessment indicators are needed.
- Low assessment scores could be misused to justify economic activity in sensitive areas.
- Protection measures should be linked to assessment results and the methodology should be updated regularly. Public accessibility should be maintained where possible.
- Reliable data and environmental impact assessments are essential for accurate UCL evaluation.

Overall results

- Rather than isolated sites, underwater cultural landscapes are interconnected systems combining cultural, natural, scientific, social and economic values.
- Wrecks, harbours, sea routes, natural features and coastal heritage should be understood in context, with value not being determined solely by age. Value should not be determined by a fixed age.
- Common themes across sectors and countries include interdisciplinary cooperation, data accessibility, technological innovation, and balancing heritage protection with offshore development and renewable energy projects.
- Aspects that should be considered more in the context of protection include assessment, environmental safety, and public awareness. Assessment methods should combine expert evaluation, scoring systems, spatial planning and narrative approaches. Accurate evaluations require reliable baseline data, archival research, mapping technologies, and environmental impact assessments.
- Marine spatial planning is a key tool for integrating UCLs into governance and protected area systems and is essential for ensuring the effective management of these areas.
- A universal terminology, clearer assessment criteria and methodologies adapted from international standards to national contexts are needed.
- Assessment results should be linked to accessibility, tourism potential, digital tools and protection measures. Tourism and communication can strengthen support for UCLs.
- UCLs are complex, multi-layered resources that require integrated management, cross-sector cooperation and flexible assessment methods that combine scientific analysis with long-term planning and societal interpretation.