

# PROPOSALS FOR PROTECTION OF THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE ON THE ISLAND OF BRAČ

Case Study

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The island of Brač is one of the largest islands of the Adriatic archipelago (394 km<sup>2</sup>) located close to the land as the first island of the inner sea stretching from Split on the west, and Makarska to the east. The island is extremely rich in monuments of cultural heritage, from archaeological sites and numerous late antique presented localities, to medieval churches on hilltops serving as landmarks in the area, to renaissance castles, fortified summer houses, and monumental baroque churches. Well preserved rural villages built of stone and the art of building drystone and stone roofs, as well as the entire cultivated landscape which through human work and maintenance gained a harmonious balance between man and nature, particularly stand out in this series. We chose several proposals for the protection of the cultural landscape precisely from this limited area of the island.

## 1. Blaca valley with the Blaca Desert monastery complex

The Valley of Blaca stretches from Vidova Gora, which is the highest peak of the island of Brač (778 m), to Blaca Bay on the south coast, and is a specific project for the protection of the cultural landscape in the centre of which is the former hermitage monastery called the Pustinja Blaca (Blaca Desert) which is very similar to the Greek Meteora. The Blaca Desert, with its total inventory, functions as an ethnic-ecological museum. The monastery contains the former astronomical observatory and all of its equipment and library, while the entire economic basis of the former hermitage has been preserved within this autarkic complex with large properties. The revitalization project consists of the recreation of the historic landscape in the whole area of Blaca valley, the restoration of drywalls and paths, terraced land bounded by piles containing traditional cultures (such as olives, vines, pyrethrum, and aromatic herbs), reconstruction of the apiary with more than three hundred stone beehives, as well as pools and alternative water sources. The project aims to appreciate historical layers and the spirit of place, taking into account the founder's vision of hermitage, to carry their values and ideas into the present

With regular care and maintenance on very limited financial resources the Hermitage Blaca was turned from distant and neglected area into a popular destination, attracting wide interest among the local population and visitors.

The education program, as once elementary school for children from villages around, will have various activities such as lectures, seminars for young people, students and scholars in historic landscape, agriculture, botanic, stone building techniques, restoration, astronomy, music and sport.

## 2. Ancient quarries in the wider Škrip area to the port of Splitska

The prehistoric hillfort settlement of Škrip in the interior of the island of Brač became particularly important in Roman times because of the stone with exceptional characteristics in its surrounding area, which was used for the construction of Diocletian's Palace in Split. There were several quarries in the vicinity of Škrip and

they were operated by the procurator of the imperial quarries. Stone blocks from the quarries were transported by stone ramps to the port of Splitska and loaded on boats sailing to various destinations: from Salona to Sirmium and Antioch. Architectural stone for building palaces and temples all over province of Dalmatia for the Diocletian's palace in Split was cut in Brač quarries.

There are pieces of rock preserved in the quarries which show traces of being treated with hand tools, along with unfinished and damaged reliefs, as well as the relief of Hercules, the patron of stonemasons. The figure carved in the stone is cult relief of the deity feasting in his natural environment. Numerous finds all over Dalmatia, as well as in Ravenna, serve as evidence to the great late antique production of sarcophagi with crosses made in Brač workshops, while recently a sunken ship with sarcophagi cargo has been discovered near the north coast of the island.

With raising awareness of a natural heritage and of industrial archaeology, so far the increasing interest for Roman quarrying traditions and skills these sites were recognised as important destinations of cultivated landscape. Recently, a path has been cleared, and a tourist-archaeological route has been marked leading to the Roman quarry with the relief of deity.

### 3. The rural village of Dol which has the status of an ethnic-ecological village

The first settlements of Dol were in the caves at the end of the longest island field, at the foot of Mihoj rat and Velo brdo. The present houses are based on, and partially built of specific ruddy sediment mixed with large pebbles which, because of its texture, is called *hrapočuša* (rough stone). These geological formations on the outside parted with walls, were once the first settlements that would later become stables for livestock. On an elevated hill which dominates the whole village, there is the medieval church of St. Peter with an exceptionally preserved matrix of the original settlement in the caves that follow the paths to the church. Small houses built of *hrapočuša* still have their original wooden roof structure covered in hand-cut stone slabs. This agricultural and farm settlement has a specific tradition of the art of making dishes such as *vitalac* (lamb intestines on a stick and wrapped in the small intestine) and the *hrapočuša* cake (large nuts cooked in sugar are similar to the sediment rock on which the village was built), which are registered in the national list of intangible cultural heritage.

The higher areas in the immediate vicinity contain shepherd lofts for tending their flocks in the warmer part of the year, with pens, puddles and pools, along with characteristic shelter for the shepherds called *bunje*. This settlement, with its renaissance castle, pre-Romanic churches, tame valley and mountain backdrop, represents a unique historical circuit of vast tradition reaching all the way from the Antique until today.

The project aims to raise awareness of the local heritage and revival of tradition among the local community. The intention is to reinforce local identity and to involve the whole population for sustainable use of the village inheritance and conserve the historic landscape of the area.

