

## **Local heritage as a development asset: an example of the island Hvar in Croatia**

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Recent years have been characterised by a growing interest in the role of local heritage as an important factor of local and regional development. Development strategies increasingly make references to the need of restoration, preservation and valorisation of local heritage. It is seen then both as a recourse for reinforcing the identity of local inhabitants providing for a stronger cohesion among them and therefore reducing incentives for them to leave the area, and as an asset that can produce a substantial value-added stimulating development in various sectors of the local economy, such as, for example, tourism or sustainable agriculture.

This paper analyses the case of the island Hvar located in the Adriatic sea near the Dalmatian coast of Croatia. Predominantly rural, although with some presence of second residences owned by urban dwellers, the island currently faces many of the challenges typical for remote and isolated rural areas. In 2008 however an important change occurred in the island's life: it was placed on the UNESCO World Heritage list. The placement was due to the presence of the site known as Stari Grad Plain. Besides being a natural reserve, it is also a cultural landscape that has remained practically intact since its colonization by ancient Greeks in the 4th century BC and is still used in the original way, for cultivation of grapes and olives. Both ancient stone constructions and the ancient system of land division ("chora") are still in use. Further, in 2009 the cross-bearing procession that goes through the whole island every year before Easter has been classified by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity.

Now that the island is recognised both as a material heritage and as an immaterial heritage, the question rises how this will or can be used for fostering development. What are the changes that can be observed and put into connection with these recognitions? What is the potential economic impact? What are the inhabitants' perceptions? The paper addresses these and associated issues.