

A STRATEGY FOR OUTREACH Vela Spila Archaeological Project, Vela Luka

Abstract

This report, the result of a visit to Vela Luka in March 2016, lays out a strategy for outreach and development specific to the archaeological site of Vela Spila and to the research of the *Mend the Gap* team. Recommendations comprise the formation of a "Friends of..." association; the creation of a site-specific children's education programme; establishment of a young archaeologists club; creation of a tour guides' training programme; construction of a museum activity programme. Also included are proposals for the demonstration of impact; suggestions of ways to enhance the commercial viability of the area; and recommendations of several low cost mechanisms for encouraging visitors to the area and enhancing their experience.

Invitation

ArchaeoLink was invited to work in Vela Luka by Dr. Dink Radić and Dr. Preston Miracle who expressed the need for an outreach programme for the community of Vela Luka. The programme would be based on the archaeological research and build on the significance of discoveries in the context of the *tongue durée* of habitation in Vela Spila, a cave above the town of Vela Luka, as part of the *Mend the Gap: Smart Integration of Genetics with Sciences of the Past in Croatia* project [MtG]. The project is an EU Commission Horizon 2020 programme for research and innovation, in which the University of Cambridge, in partnership with the University of Pisa, have secured a grant for a 3-year Twinning project with the University of Zagreb, Croatia¹.

Location & Description

Vela Spila (Big Cave) the multi-layered prehistoric site, is situated 120m above sea level and the town of Vela Luka. It has a single, large, limestone chamber approximately 50m long, 30m wide, and 17m high; and is well lit by two holes in the roof. Its 4m wide, 10m high entrance faces southwest, overlooking the bay of Vela Luka².

¹ www.arch.cam.ac.uk/Horizon2020Croatia (accessed: 24.03.16)

² Cristiani, E et al. Ornamental traditions in the Eastern Adriatic: The Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic personal adornments from Vela Spila (Croatia) JAA 36 (2014) 21–31

Archaeological excavations began in 1951, continued under Božidar Čečuk (1974–1995), followed by Dinko Radić (1996–2006) and then Dinko Radić with Preston Miracle (2007–present). Evidence indicates a very long sequence of occupation from the Late Upper Palaeolithic (Epigravettian) through the Bronze Age³. Vela Spila is a particularly rich source of both organic remains and material culture.

The cave can be accessed by road or by a cement foot-path, lined with native plants and flowers, which gently climbs the terraced hill through numerous olive groves.

The town of Vela Luka (Large Port) is situated on the western end of Korčula Island, in the southern Dalmatian archipelago of Croatia and has a population of approximately 4,500. It grew over the last two hundred years with an economy of commercial wine production, fish processing and shipbuilding. These industries have since ceased to exist and today the economy is based around tourism and a health facility.

Stakeholder Goals

Dinko Radić, Director and Curator of the Archaeological Collections, Cultural Centre Vela Luka, wishes to convey a number of concepts important to the role of mankind in the passage of time: including the presentation of phenomena such as the rise of sea level, volcanic eruptions and their effect on humans, and a graphical explanation of the “Neolithic revolution”. His prime objective is to promote greater knowledge of Vela Spila and to highlight its importance in our understanding of the human journey, to the local community.

Preston Miracle, co-Director of MtG identifies the project's principle goal as enabling academics in Croatia to confidently and successfully apply for tranches of EU funding. He hopes that the cave will gain in national and international recognition, consequently providing a focus for tourism development and a source of economic prosperity.

Ino Čurik, co-Director of MtG hopes that the people of Vela Spila will come to understand the significance of their cave in the story of the development of humankind and that every tourist who reaches Korčula town will make a visit to Vela Spila a priority.

Rada Dragojević Ćosovi, Curator of Arts, Cultural Centre Vela Luka , organises several exhibitions a year and has curated a successful oral histories programme. She would like more display space so certain works of art may be on permanent exhibition. She wishes for greater numbers of people to be convinced that their heritage and art are important.

Dorian Dragojevic, General Manager of Vela Luka Tourist Information Office⁴ and member of the Tourist Board, wishes for updated information on Vela Spila which he sees as a major attraction. The Tourist Board's web-site is currently being renovated and, to accompany it, he would like to see newer panels at the cave, an interactive programme and perhaps virtual reality displays. He lamented the lack for two years of an informative Vela Spila brochure.

³ Farbstein, R et al. First Epigravettian Ceramic Figurines from Europe (Vela Spila, Croatia). PLoS ONE (2012) 7(7)

⁴ <http://www.tzvelaluka.hr/?lang=en&index=1>

Nevenko Zuvela, Managing Director of the *Mediterano* Travel Agency, believes the traditional tourist season of July and August is lengthening to include May, June and September and wished this to be strengthened by improved promotion of Vela Spila and Vela Luka's other assets. He would like to see informative signs at the beginning of the path to the cave which indicate opening times and provide contact phone numbers to get access to the cave's gate key. He believes guides, financed by the Municipality, would be an asset.

Tonko Gugić, the Mayor, would like to see more recognition of Vela Spila as a valuable archaeological locality to enrich the tourist offer of Vela Luka as a unique destination⁵. He would also like to have the tourist season extended.

Lucijana Mirošević, Headmistress of the Elementary School, desires an educational resource programme be written for a project based on Vela Spila. She was keen to extend an invitation to visiting specialists to pop into the school to talk to the children. English is taught from the age of 7 and opportunities for conversation would be appreciated.

Residents expressed much interest in archaeological activities at Vela Spila and looked forward to learning more. Individually they welcomed new ideas for developing tourism, but several have reservations about their neighbours' enthusiasm for participating in growth.

Challenges

The fish-processing plant closed in 2005 and the *Greben* shipyard, also once a major employer, began down-sizing in 2011 and has recently effectively closed. These closures have contributed to a general malaise which was verbalised on several occasions as reason why "people" were slow to contribute to the social well-being of the community.

It was further suggested that the legacy of the communist regime has resulted in the depression of entrepreneurship and that consequently many people were lacking the confidence to instigate commercial enterprises.

Resources

Vela Luka is situated in an area of natural beauty with a large and curving inlet and surrounding coastline dotted with bays looking out to a number of islands. There are several archaeological and historical sites within easy reach which could be developed advantageously to offer an array of points of interest.

⁵ Lee, K.S. Mimica, V. Et al Museum 21+ Vela Spila, Archive of Simultaneous Times Berlage Institute, Rotterdam. 2007, p113.

Areas of interest

Vela Spila

The cave is featured as a major attraction in tourist brochures, although its significance is not widely understood by the inhabitants of Vela Luka. A 5m fence screens its entrance to prevent injury both to visitors and the site. During the season a guardian opens the gate in the afternoons and is paid by commission from the € 2 entrance fee; he supplements his income with the sale of water and souvenirs. At other times a key is available at the Korkyra Hotel and another at the Tourist Information Office for anyone wishing to visit. One information panel is at the entrance and can be read even if access is locked; 7 more panels line the walls of the cave. The area of excavation is loosely roped off; there are no warning signs.

The Cultural Centre

Partly built of traditional stone as a school in the mid 19th century, the Cultural Centre has an attractive arched entrance leading to a courtyard where 20th century mosaics are displayed. As well as offices for the Director and for the Curator of Arts, the building houses the public library; a function room; an 'L' shaped art gallery; a room exhibiting images and information on traditional stone houses; and the museum which displays finds from Vela Spila as well as from the local area.

Acquisitions include a unique collection of hand crafted wooden boats by a self-taught artist; a number of works by local and national artists; and international art works donated to Vela Luka after an unusually high tide caused much damage in 1978.

In his quest for a greater display area, the Director has been trying to repossess a room previously given to the now defunct kindergarten. Ultimately he would like to see the area leading to Vela Spila and its immediate vicinity become a designated 10ha Archaeological Park and a museum of the 21st century constructed with a multi-media hall, inter-disciplinary centre, laboratories, services etc. as outlined at a workshop in 2007⁶.

Churches

As well as the Parochial Church of St. John with its separate bell tower, there are 14 other churches and chapels in the area, dating from the 12th to the 21st centuries. Their histories have been researched and documented⁷ and several have signs in Croatian and English to inform the visitor.

Archaeological site of Kopila

This Iron Age settlement on the crest of Kopila hill, 5km to the east of Vela Spila, dominates views of the Korčula channel and spilled down the southerly hillside overlooking fertile fields, as it expanded. Some excavation of the necropolis below has revealed sepulchres, beads, amber and weapons of those Illyrians who lived at the site before Augustus Caesar's troops massacred them to end their piracy. The site, although not yet ready for visitors, is on a hiking trail.

⁶ Lee, K.S. Mimica, V. Et al Museum 21+ Vela Spila, Archive of Simultaneous Times Berlage Institute, Rotterdam. 2007 p15, pp29-31
⁷ Dragojević, R.Č. Churches and Chapels in the Borough of Vela Luka Centar za kulturu, Vela Luka. 2007.

Terracing

All the hills on Korčula are heavily terraced. Hundreds of thousands of kilometers of stone walls were constructed to provide fertile ground for vineyards in the late 19th century. This was in response to the phylloxera epidemic which destroyed most of the vineyards in Europe, but had not yet reached Korčula which exported its wines throughout the Mediterranean basin.

Fortification

Overlooking Vela Luka, on the top of Hum hill, is the 19th century Austro-Hungarian military installation. It offers splendid views.

Kalos Rehabilitation Hospital

Built in the 1970s, because of the proximity of mineral rich muds and thermal spring, the facility offers a range of treatments to those suffering from chronic disease, trauma, congenital malformations or recovering from surgery. Half of its 250 beds are used annually by ca.3500 Croatian Health Insurance beneficiaries and the remainder mostly by self-financing patients from Bosnia & Herzegovina. Employing less than 200 people, it is affiliated to the Split Medical School and thus provides clinical teaching in Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine.⁸

High School Training Programme

An initiative, affiliated to the High School, to prepare young people for the job market with practical skills training, successfully produced a 76 page touristic brochure entitled *Welcome to Korčula*. The material was researched and resourced, collated and produced by the students.

Events

Most events are scheduled from the end of June to the beginning of September on an almost nightly basis. These include traditional *Klapa* (capella) singing; *Kumpanjija*, a traditional sword fight; folk dances; brass band and other musical performances; wine tastings; food festivals (e.g. pasta making & tasting); also organised are art exhibitions, photographic displays, regattas and tennis tournaments.

Practicalities

Access

Vela Luka is reached by ferry or catamaran from Split, the journeys taking 4 and 3 hours respectively. In February a daily sea plane service⁹ was inaugurated offering a 15 minute trip.

Accommodation

There are 5 hotels of various classes with about 800 beds.

The private rental of rooms, apartments and houses is commonplace with over a hundred properties available.

⁸ Pecoti - Jerčević, S. et al. Kalos Rehabilitation Hospital in Vela Luka, Croatia, Croat Med J. 2008 Jun, 49(3): 291–294.

⁹ www.ec-air.eu

Transportation & Tours

Regular small boats ferry people from one side of Vela Luka to the other, or to nearby islands or beaches. Several picnic & swimming boat trips¹⁰ and tours¹¹ are on offer in the season. Cars, scooters¹² and bikes may be rented. Bus connections to other parts of Korčula are available all year.

Local Food

The terraces and rich fertile plains produce olive oils, wines and a wide range of produce. Homemade cheeses, locally smoked meats and freshly caught fish offer the possibility of an abundant Croatian gastronomy. An array of locally grown herbs and spices are used in traditional culinary and curative recipes. These and a variety of fruits, vegetables and leaves are used to make a wide range of liqueurs.

10 Nasiskoji.velaluka@gmail.com

11 www.velalukarent.com

12 www.mediterrano.hr

ArchaeoLink Recommendations

The following recommendations will assist the *Mend the Gap* team in extending the community impact of their research in the area of Vela Luka, and thereby also help the community obtain the widest possible educational, economic and societal benefits from its archaeology and heritage, and to encourage as many visitors as possible.

Archaeological Research, Outputs, Education and Enrichment

The establishment of a non-profit, non-political association: "Friends of Vela Spila"* club or society. This would assist several objectives related to the archaeology and heritage of Vela Luka and its surrounds; it would:

- ✧ encourage a feeling of homogeneity among existing volunteers and interested parties;
- ✧ assist multi-directional dissemination of information & knowledge;
- ✧ form a volunteer base for community projects and events.

It is suggested that a Chairperson and, or Events Coordinator, Secretary, and Treasurer be chosen who have time to give to the society. It is recommended that Dinko Radić be appointed Chief Executive Officer so he might steer the group and have oversight of activities.

To maintain momentum and interest, it is suggested that the core committee organise activities / events on at least a once monthly basis, perhaps more frequently when more archaeologists are in residence.

*This name is purely a suggestion; Friends of Vela Luka or Friends of Archaeology & Heritage or some other name may better suit the group's terms of reference.

A site-specific Educational Resource Pack specific to Vela Spila as revealed by its archaeology, be written for use in the Elementary School¹³. This will include notes for teachers so that they fully understand the objectives of each activity and the archaeological context, thus no prior knowledge is required; lesson plans to assist with project organisation; children's work sheets etc. Some of the worksheets might be retained in English to be used in conjunction with the teaching of English.

This Resource Pack will include activities to be completed before, and after a museum visit and will be supported by the opportunity for the children to handle 3D copies of objects on display as well as original artefacts.

¹³ www.os-vela-luka.skole.hr

Working with the Elementary School and referencing the Croatian National Curriculum, *ArchaeoLink* carefully assesses the best pedagogical approach for use of educational resources. Our resources develop the investigative skills of children while nurturing an interest in the world around them. Children are encouraged to understand and appreciate their unique heritage, thus an important aim is that children feel a sense of belonging and pride in their local community. Research has shown that the enthusiasm of children will lead to, and encourage, the enthusiasm of their parents.

Initially this education programme will be developed for Upper Primary aged children, blending elements from the National Curriculum where possible; it is then proposed to be extended into the High School.

A Young Archaeologists Club¹⁴ be established for 10-18 year olds.

The objectives include to:

- ✧ encourage an interest in the archaeology, history and heritage of the past, as it relates to Vela Luka and its surroundings;
- ✧ provide fun, inspirational and motivational activities, events and visits;
- ✧ promote knowledge exchange.

It is suggested, to maintain momentum and interest, that meetings are held at least every other week and that a Facebook page be created to advertise and record members and events.

ArchaeoLink can assist in the organisation of a "Dig the Garden" project where the youngsters will be trained in the basics of excavation: digging, drawing sections, recording, cleaning & labelling finds etc. Ideally members of the "Friends of..." Association will volunteer to assist with supervision. Digging a meter square test pit in a number of gardens will not only offer training, but will encourage community involvement.

Enhancement of Vela Spila could be achieved by:

- ✧ placing a sign at beginning of the path with opening times and a phone number to call at other times for information / a guide &/or a key;
- ✧ removing the gate and fence from the mouth of the cave, and bringing it forward by some 10 meters, with the top designed to prevent climbing, to allow an unrestricted view of the entrance to the cave;
- ✧ creating a display area of 3D copies of major artefacts found;
- ✧ creating a stratigraphic display e.g. within a broad upright clear, cylindrical tube;
- ✧ reposition display panels to be legible near the entrance;
- ✧ a narrow circular wooden walk-way might be considered, if visitor numbers increase considerably, to avoid unnecessary wear on the cave floor and to keep visitors safe from falling on slippery surfaces;
- ✧ a replica Neolithic hearth and loom (as per Archaeological Museum of Zagreb) might be installed;
- ✧ installing a panorama table identifying all that can be seen from the cave;
- ✧ creating small information panels about the plants along the path;
- ✧ as VS plant remains are identified, plant the modern equivalent along the path with appropriate labels.

¹⁴ <http://theyoungarchaeologist.com/about/welcome-to-the-young-archaeologist/>

A Tour Guides Training Programme will provide a number of individuals with the ability to lead groups and accurately inform them about Vela Spila. It is anticipated that *ArchaeoLink* will create the programme and a Guide's Resource Pack in association with the existing High School training programme.

The Museum was closed as major exhibits were in Zagreb for an exhibition, *Korčula before Christianity*. Thus it will be reviewed later.

Museum Activity Programme: designed to inform and entertain resident and visiting young people, the provision of a fun and instructive programme for children to include touchable materials. This will comprise:

- ✦ an Activity Pack;
- ✦ a Museum Guide; and
- ✦ an Activity Trail,

to be used by both visiting families and school groups accompanied by a teacher.

This programme, which will be a bespoke package, will include original artwork and promote investigative learning.

A web-based interactive learning resource, designed to transmit information and to capture responses, will also be implemented. The resulting database could be interrogated by teachers, researchers, museum staff and impact assessors in order to monitor and demonstrate the impact of the project.

Ethnographic museum : the establishment of a permanent museum space to illustrate ways of living, would give Vela Luka an additional feature of interest. Exhibits could be based on Neolithic finds and MtG's research, together with information relating to historical as well as pre-industrial living, still remembered by many today. Residents could participate, therefore engendering pride in their heritage, by offering articles on permanent loan from their family collections.

Strategy for Tourism and Visitors

The research of the MtG team is seen not only as an additional attribute to the heritage of Vela Luka and the appreciation of such, but also as being of benefit economically in assisting to augment the tourist potential of Vela Luka which is a well-established 'summer holiday' destination. The potential exists for lengthening the traditional tourist season; however it has to be recognised that, unlike the summer holiday-makers, it is a different clientele that needs to be catered for. The following are recommendations for its facilitation.

The Recreational Activity tourism market could be tapped into by offering a variety of work-shops where classes are conducted in the mornings, leaving the afternoons free for sight-seeing.

Entrepreneurial members of Vela Luka community have the potential for offering the following:

- ✧ olive picking and olive oil making (make your own olive oil);
- ✧ make your own liqueurs (collecting ingredients and initial processing);
- ✧ cooking classes;
- ✧ soap making;
- ✧ jewellery making;
- ✧ sketching & watercolour painting;
- ✧ pottery making;
- ✧ yoga / meditation.

Afternoon sightseeing would include:

- ✧ walk to Vela Spila (preferably guided);
- ✧ visit to Museum (also perhaps guided);
- ✧ visit to Korčula old town;
- ✧ guided visit to Kopila;
- ✧ scenic boat trip (possible even in cooler months);
- ✧ guided nature walk.

Skilled Demonstrations: people enjoy watching others at work; viewing processes of production. Where health and safety allow, viewing areas can be a draw. OPG Grbin offer a range of locally made products: sweets, soaps, jams, oils and liqueurs. Conceivably some of the producers would be happy for visitors to watch or participate in their work. Similarly, craft producers could make their studios or work-shops, open to the public at certain times.

Churches: a brochure with a brief description, taken from *Churches & Chapels of Vela Luka*¹⁵ of a selection of the nearby churches and chapels would offer information on these points of interest to some.

Vela Luka Website: is currently being upgraded so will be reviewed at a later date.

15 Dragojević, R.Č. Churches and Chapels in the Borough of Vela Luka Centar za kulturu, Vela Luka. 2007

Forteca: this point of interest would be enhanced by:

- ✧ an information panel about the fortress and life within; and
- ✧ a panorama table identifying all that can be seen from the hill.

Thermal Spa – Hydrotherapy: If the current *Kalos* facilities were upgraded, it would be possible to attract a wider clientele, possibly all year round, not only to enjoy the thermal waters and the mineral rich, curative mud, but to take advantage of a complete range of well-being and health-tourism¹⁶ options including, but not limited to, special diets, cleansing, massages, exercises, reflexology, spa treatments and meditation. Such offerings, if coupled with sightseeing activities would make a stay in Vela Luka very attractive and extend tourism into the winter months. Indeed, in this way, Kalos could become a major employer.

It is recommended that the *Općina* Vela Luka and the Tourist Board be in contact with Neda Telišman Košuta¹⁷, the head of the national Action Plan for Health Tourism Development at the Institute for Tourism in Zagreb for assistance in bringing this to fruition.

Wine: Although phylloxera did eventually reach Korčula, it may well be possible that not all original strains were wiped out. If certain vines which were not affected by the disease have been tended over the years and are still cultivated, such a rarity would attract much attention as well as prosperity¹⁸. If plant geneticists could be involved in a programme of the successful discovery of such a vine, the tangible impact would be extremely valuable.

Demonstration of Impact: Qualitative and quantitative data could be obtained by brief "Before & After" surveys in Croatian and English for both adults & children. Features to include:

- ✧ anonymous online survey with assigned reference numbers;
- ✧ accessed by a QR code for use on personal phone; and/or
- ✧ a computer terminal at the entrance to museum; an area for comments;
- ✧ incentives to provide feedback information ranging from the promotion of the satisfaction of assisting with change, to the promotion of the satisfaction of puzzle, mystery or game solving;
- ✧ pathway/gate counters to monitor visitor numbers to Vela Spila for comparison over the course of the project;
- ✧ collaboration with the local tourist board and local government to monitor changes in tourist numbers and revenue;
- ✧ working with local schools to monitor changes in academic achievement in students participating in the 'Young Archaeologists' programme;
- ✧ working with local craft people to monitor production and sale of local artistic and cultural items;
- ✧ working with local government to monitor the growth of new arts, culture and tourism-based enterprises connected to the work of MtG.

¹⁶ www.utm.hr

¹⁷ neda.kosuta@iztg.hr

¹⁸ O'Keefe, K. [The great escape](#). Decanter 2005 (accessed March,2016)

Promotion: *ArchaeoLink* will assist in promoting both the site and the location by providing archaeological-tourism articles for publications such as *Current World Archaeology*, *Minerva* etc.

Concluding Remarks

This report is a result of a visit during the early Spring when there were scant visitors in Vela Luka, few restaurants open and no market. A follow-up report will be made from observations during the tourist season in September.

The *ArchaeoLink* team is available to discuss any aspects of this report further and would be pleased to assist the *Mend the Gap* team and/or the *Općina* of Vela Luka to advance any of the proposals or recommendations herein; now or at a future date.

Patricia Duff
Project Director

April, 2016

Addendum

The initial **Survey** was established in March, 2016 and will run for 6 months.

Having been asked to produce an **Educational Resource Pack** by the Headmistress of the Elementary School work has started on its creation.

As a **Vela Spila information brochure** was urgently requested by the Director of the Tourist Office, a draft was prepared immediately, edited and approved for publication by end March, 2016. It was accompanied by a **marketing flyer**.

Appendix

My thanks to the people I met on my visit, all of whom have contributed to this report.

Korkula Town

Persa Karaç

Nenad & Joka Karaç - Apartment Sirena

Vela Luka

Korkyra Hotel

Fani & Niki - receptionists

Vedrana - Front Office Manager

Ivana Škoro - Director Sales

Dino - barman

Linda - waitress

Dorian Dragojević - Tourist Board & office

Niki (Nikolina) - assistant Tourist Information (makes jewellery)

Dinko Radić - Director of Cultural Centre, archaeologist, history teacher

Rada Dragojević Ćosović - curator of 'modern art'

Anita - Librarian

Maria - Assistant Librarian

Tony Surjan - Val Radio broadcaster - Organises summer festivals, Folklore, baroque, dances

Nicolina Oreb - Primary school English teacher 3rd / 4th grade

Dalibor Vlašić - retired from Lloyds Register of Shipping

Sandra Vlašić - paints, former tour guide, embassy administrator, teacher of languages

Marina Barčot - chef, owner Alfa pizzeria

Alexandra Dragojević - (daughter)

Tihana Oreb - Mediterano tourist agency & Villa rentals

Ivan Mikulandra - engineer

Marco - (son 14)

Lucijana Mirošević - Head teacher Primary school

Katerina Curać - English teacher Primary school & translator

4 classes of pupils of the Vela Luka Elementary School aged 10-12 & 13-14 & their teachers

Nevenko Žuvela - owner of 'Mediterrano' tourist agency

Zoriana - High school secretary

Fani - High school accountant

Tonko Gugić - Mayor

Zoran Manestar - Deputy Mayor

Fanika Arnautović - hotel K. receptionist & teacher

Andrea Živko - High School English teacher & trainer / brochures

Natali - Fortuna Travel Zagreb

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