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“Our Shared Heritage – Vučedol Culture” - Interreg V-A Hungary-Croatia Co-operation Programme HUHR/1901/2.1.3/0153

Valorising the Prehistorical Vučedol Heritage

Artistic and Archaeological Cooperation in the Croatian-Hungarian Borderlands and the Development of Cross-Border Tourism

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Abstract

The study contextualises and analyses touristic valorisation practices of the prehistorical Vučedol culture. This Indo-European civilisation spread in the third millennium B.C. to the territory of at least twelve contemporary European countries, leaving behind a rich material heritage. One of the main sites and the denominating location of the culture is the valley Vučedol next to the Eastern Croatian town of Vukovar on the right bank of the Danube. A big part of the rich and widely known archaeological material – including the famous bird-shaped vessel, known as the Vučedol dove – is exhibited at the Vučedol Culture Museum (*Muzej vučedolske kulture*) since 2015. Beside this museum, objects from this era are to be found in many collections across the region.

The Croatian-Hungarian borderlands (the South of Baranya county in Hungary, as well as Osijek-Baranja and Vukovar-Srijem counties in Croatia) can be seen as a rather peripheral region struggling with many structural problems and high unemployment, as well as the effects of the wars of the 1990s. Although there has been a dynamical development of tourism in the last decades in both Croatia and Hungary, the aforementioned region(s) could so far profit less from this general trend. However, there are new touristic projects, which have been developed on both sides of the border to exploit the touristic potential, including the festivals Ördögkatlan and Bököz in Hungary, the touristic branding of Eastern Croatia and the eponymous festival HeadOnEast in Osijek, VukovART festival in Vukovar, as well as parts of the Old Dráva development plan in Hungary.

The study focuses on the touristic impact of the project “Our Shared Heritage – Vučedol Culture” which is under realisation in the framework of Interreg V-A Hungary-Croatia Co-operation Programme. The project identifies the aforementioned Vučedol culture as a shared heritage of both countries and provides new artistic and popular historical narratives presented at festivals, schools and in the media. The project is based on the cooperation of Croatian and Hungarian archaeologists and other scholars, contemporary artists and NGO activists. The project pays special attention to the relations in society, sustainable resource management, as well as to myths and beliefs of the Vučedol era. In the study we will present and analyse the

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impact of the project in general as well as selected events. How to valorise archaeological heritage in cross-border tourism – which are the antecedents and other good practices which can serve as an inspiration? What kind of a role can contemporary art play in this process? How to deal with the informational asymmetry of the wider Hungarian and Croatian public regarding Vučedol culture, given that Vučedol (especially the bird-shaped vessel, which also appears on the 20 Croatian Kuna banknote) is widely seen as an integral part of historical heritage of Croatia, whereas this culture is barely known in Hungary outside academia? How can Vučedol culture be connected to touristic offers of the wider region, which actors can be addressed? We intend to find answers to these questions on the following pages.

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1. Exploring the Centre of the (Prehistorical) World - Vučedol Culture as Heritage

The city of Vukovar is situated on the right bank of the Danube, being the seat of Vukovar-Syrmium county in the easternmost part of Croatia. According to the national census of 2011, the municipality had an overall population of 27 683 people.¹ Vukovar's economy is mainly based on agriculture and services. Also, before the transition and the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, the town was considered an important centre of the textile industry – mostly because of the factories Borovo and Vuteks. In the international public Vukovar is unfortunately known as one of the bloodiest and most traumatic places during the wars in the former Yugoslavia, ie. the Croatian War of Independence. The results of the battle of Vukovar is the almost complete destruction of the city centre, the death or disappearance of thousands of civilians and soldiers. After years of control under the Yugoslav National Army and a preliminary period under UN-jurisdiction the town had been reintegrated to the administration of the Republic of Croatia in 1997.

In the last decades, the city centre (including its historical core) has been rebuilt. Due to its symbolical importance during the war, the reconstruction and development of Vukovar and its wider area have been in the focus of many Croatian governments. Still, the area is struggling with many structural problems; including the vanishing of the once dominant industries and high unemployment. Another, related problem of the city (and the East of Croatia in general) are the recent migration trends; the brain-drain within the country and Europe. In this situation the development of tourism appears as one way to economically revitalise the East of Croatia. Although Croatia has an economy traditionally relying on tourism, this branch has been rather limited to the national and international tourism on the seaside in the summer months. Recent efforts of the Croatian Board of Tourism (*Hrvatska turistička zajednica*) – such as the Croatia 365 campaign – aim to widen the scope of Croatian tourism and attract visitors to visit various sites in the country during all seasons.²

An unexploited touristic opportunity related to Vukovar is the prehistorical archaeological site situated 3 km south of the town on the riverside. In 1897 at the vineyards of the Streim family,

¹ https://www.dzs.hr/Hrv_Eng/publication/2012/SI-1469.pdf [downloaded on 12. April 2021]

² <https://www.travelbulletin.co.uk/news-mainmenu/new-croatia-365-campaign-aims-to-attract-more-year-round-visitors> [downloaded on 10. April 2021]



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at the place called Vučedol (Wolf's Valley) archaeologist Josip Brunšmid discovered an important settlement from the late eneolithic period. In the following decades and centuries the locality earned fame among historians and archaeologists. In 1938 on the excavation of R. R. Schmidt a bird-shaped vessel – the famous dove or partridge – was found, which in the following decades became both nationally and internationally the most recognisable object of the culture. More excavations followed in the 1960s and after 1984 (which has been interrupted by the Yugoslav wars) (FORENBAHER 1995: 17-18). According to the archaeological evidence and the historical interpretations the eneolithic – early bronze age settlement of Vučedol housed thousands of inhabitants around 3000 B.C. Due to the demographical and technological importance of the settlement, Vučedol is known today as the centre of the eponymous culture, which existed on the territories of around 12-13 contemporary countries of today's Europe. The core area of the civilisation can be located in the historical Baranja-Baranya, Srijem-Srem (Syrmiium) and Slavonia regions. The Indo-European Vučedol culture can be characterised by the developed metallurgy (using bronze and copper) and its ceramics, including the bird-shaped vessels (in Vučedol and Zók for instance) and the unique technique of decoration with melt bone powder. One should note the elaborated decorations on the ceramics of this era, showing the high degree of astronomical knowledge of Vučedolians. An impressive example of the celestial symbolism is the “calendar” vessel found in Vučedol, depicting the astronomical constellation of the starry, which happened to occur on the 9th of March 2889 B.C. (see DURMAN 2001).

Found on many excavations, objects related to Vučedol culture are today to be observed in museums of the cross-border region (Vukovar, Vinkovci, Osijek, Sombor, Pécs), but also in the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb and the National Museum in Belgrade. However, until recently there was no institution, which was entirely dedicated to the Vučedol culture and no *in situ* exhibition at the place of numerous further archaeological excavations. A dedicated institution – the Vučedol Culture Museum; *Muzej vučedolske kulture* – was established by the Government of Croatia in 2013 and two years later a brand new exhibition complex was opened. The establishing of Vučedol Culture Museum had been realised in the broader framework of the touristical revitalisation of Eastern Croatia. The museum is centered around the building designed by the architect Vanja Ilić and his colleagues. The main building is carved into the

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archaeological locality. The building won the Viktor Kovačić-award for the best new building in Croatia in 2015.³ The exhibition hall hosts a permanent exhibition as well as other events and spectacles as well. Interactive exhibition places are placed around the new building; such as the megaron of the copper smith and the renewed Villa Streim (the domicile of Vučedol's 19th-century owner). The collection of the museum offers an all-encompassing overview on the Vučedol culture, including its geographical-anthropological context, chronology, lifestyle, professions and beliefs and at the same time presenting a rich fundus of the excavations in Vučedol. In the future, another development in and around the Museum is planned, with the final goal of establishing an archaeological park in its surroundings. One can summarise the establishment and the activities of the museum as an undertaking to present the quite impressive objects of the Vučedol culture in their original context thus bringing this prehistorical civilisation closer to the visitors, make it visible and „enjoyable”. The museum situated on a quite peripheral geographical position (at Croatian-Serbian border, at a remote riverside) invites the visitor into an era when the very same place used to be one of the most important places, social and technological centres of contemporary Europe, one of the 'cradles' of the Indo-European civilisation.⁴

2. Heritage as a Basis for International Cooperation

Thanks to the continuous excavations, as well as the presence of the civilisation and its objects in the Croatian public space and school curricula, the wider Croatian public already has some knowledge on the Vučedol culture. The probably most known reference to Vučedol is on the 20 Croatian Kuna banknote, which was for the first time issued in 1993 and which features the „Vučedol dove” as well. Although Vučedol and the site Zók in Baranya are widely known among archaeologists and historians, in Hungary this Bronze Age civilisation is almost unknown to the general public of the cross-border region. This asymmetry of knowledge represents both an obstacle and a great potential for future international cooperations in the domain of cultural heritage.

³ <http://pogledaj.to/arhitektura/nagradu-viktor-kovacic-dobio-muzej-vucedolske-kulture/> (Downloaded on 10. April 2021)

⁴ <http://vucedol.hr/hr/posiet/> (Downloaded on 10. April 2021)



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Since 2015 Vučedol Culture Museum is actively working on popularising of the Vučedol culture through various touristical and artistic cooperations on the national level. The museum is part of the institutional cooperation City of Museums (*Grad Muzeja*) in Vukovar, offering a unique touristic offer to the visitors of Vukovar. Also, the institution is intensively cooperating with astronomical associations, the Drama School of Osijek as well as the Department of Tourism of VERN University in Zagreb (RAŠPERIĆ-LEKIĆ-FIŠTREK 2016). Each year, the Museum organises two showcase events; the Night of Museums (*Noć muzeja*) in January and the Vučedol Culture Festival on the 1st of June, the birthday of the institution (*Festival Vučedolske kulture*).

The activities in the project „Our Shared Heritage – Vučedol Culture” largely benefited from the experiences collected during the project „Journey to the Beginnings” (JTTB). This programme was financed by the Creative Europe scheme and lead by the Budapest-based contemporary arts hub Pro Progressione. The list of partners included prehistorical museums and archaeological parks along the Danube river in Hungary, Croatia, Serbia and Romania among others the Vučedol Culture Museum. Besides these institutions cultural, scientific and IT stakeholders took part in the project.⁵ The related activities discovered the role of contemporary art and technical solutions (such as augmented reality) in presenting and interpreting archaeological evidence. These methods proved to be powerful tool in building a „creative bridge” between what we know about prehistorical civilisations and the imagination of the wider public. Among the results of the „interpretative evaluation” of the project one should highlight the eponymous time travel-themed mobile application (created by Novena company), a musical album by composer Ljubomir Nikolić, which was inspired by prehistory, as well as a theatrical adventure game, performed at the participating museums. The theatrical game, written and directed by Máté Czako offers an immersive experience for the visitors of the archaeological parks. The play is related to the archaeological evidence of the archaeological localities. However since the knowledge about these prehistorical culture is very limited, the theatre game uses the visitor’s imagination to bring prehistorical cultures closer to them. The basic preassumption of the play is the common anthropological identity between the prehistorical cultures and today’s civilization. By taking part in the game the participants are

⁵ <http://journeytothebeginnings.eu/> (Downloaded on 5. April 2021)



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getting familiar with the fact that the seemingly very different prehistorical civilizations were made up of the same *Homo sapiens sapiens*, who had similar wishes and concerns as the contemporary human. The project Journey to the Beginnings created a series of attractive cultural products, which constitute a connection between different archaeological sites in the four participating countries. In its narrative travelling between the sites a time travel to the beginnings of human civilisation. It constitutes a single touristic product, of which every partner can benefit. The upcoming undertaking „Our Common Heritage – Vučedol Culture” uses the knowledge and experience collected during the previous project; both programmes make use of gamification and immersive theatre to make cross-border cultural products.

3. Exploring „Our Shared Heritage”: a Hungarian-Croatian Case Study

The project „Our Shared Heritage – Vučedol Culture” is being implemented in 2020 and 2022 in the framework of the Interreg Hungary-Croatia Cross-border Co-operation Programme. Four partners are taking part in the activities. Besides Vučedol Culture Museum, PLANTaža Association (Udruga PLANTaža) in Osijek raising ecological awareness and dealing with urban activism, Ördögkatlan Festival Association is known as the organiser of one of the most important multi-art manifestations in Southern Hungary, DDTG Limited from Pécs is engaging in projects dealing with cross-border development and sustainability. The project aims to develop touristic attractions in the Hungarian-Croatian cross-border region by creating and implementing a set of games, events and narratives on Vučedol culture. Besides popularising Vučedol culture, the project also reflects on contemporary issues, such as sustainability and social cohesion.

Among other project outputs, two Vučedol-themed touristic products have been developed by Hungary-based creative team consisting of experts of immersive theatre, museum pedagogy, archaeology, history and cultural heritage valorisation and led by Árpád Bayer. *2700 BC – Recreate Vučedol* is a collaborative game combining the characteristics of board games and live action role playing (*LARP*) – related to the experience of so-called „megagames”. *Return to Wolf’s Valley* is a theatre adventure game (*TAG*) playing in a bronze age village. Both games are aiming visitors of Hungarian and Croatian festivals more than 12 years old. On the following pages we summarise the challenges of the creative work, its methodology and our experiences on one of the main events of the project; Ördögkatlan festival in Hungary. During its work, the

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creative team was confronted with three main challenges; 1) New contexts: how to present Vučedol at major regional festivals and how to address the widest possible public; 2) Sustainability: reflecting on contemporary ecological problems; 3) Resilience: creating touristic products, which can be presented in different settings (an amid the quickly changing COVID-19 pandemic situation).

1) New contexts

The main project partner of „Our Shared Heritage” is the association which is organising the 5-6 days long Ördögkatlan (‘Devil’s Canyon’) festival, taking place every summer in five villages (Nagyharsány, Kisharsány, Villánykövesd and Beremend) in Baranya county, in the southernmost part of Hungary. The festival was initiated by theatre director László Bérczes in 2008 with the help of famous patrons; actress Mari Törőcsik and singer-songwriter Tamás Cseh. Although Ördögkatlan festival is mostly known for its award-winning theatre performances, it evolved into a multi-art festival including popular and folk music concerts, exhibitions, literature readings, attracting visitors from all over Hungary. The organisers always pay attention to the dangers of *overtourism*, and avoid harmful environmental and social impact on the hosting villages. The manifestation is presented as a *barefoot festival*, which is close to the nature and the local communities. The organisers refer to themselves as basket-weavers (*kosárfonók*), who are always working and playing with the visitors and are thus creating together the very cultural product. This close relation between the festival and local communities is expressed by the word-game *köztivál* (*public festival*).

Being held at the very border of Hungary and Croatia, one of the goals of Ördögkatlan festival is building connections between local communities on the Hungarian and Croatian side. The main motivation behind the project „Our Shared Heritage” is to develop cultural products related to the Vučedol culture which are attractive both to the Croatian and Hungarian public. However, these manifestations take place in a new context; on a multi-art festival and not a museum or an archaeological park. On a festival, visitors have much less – in the Hungarian case virtually no – knowledge about Vučedol culture than visitors of the aforementioned institutions. In a festival environment amidst strong visual and sound stimuli the organisers have to offer a wide range of cultural products which can grab the attention of potential visitors-players.

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2) Sustainability

The touristic evaluation of the archaeological heritage can be seen as a process of collaborative learning, strengthening the bond between heritage and communities (BERECZ-BÖCZÉN: 2). This learning process is based on the interplay of two main elements; the archaeological evidence and imagination (Sofaer). During the creative process of the project „Our Shared Heritage” one has to pay equal attention to both sides. Due to different backgrounds of the visitors, the prehistorical civilisation has to be introduced in a brief but all-encompassing and trustworthy way. On the other side, imagination of the visitors has to be used to “fill in” the black holes ie. the lack of archaeological evidence and to build a sense of community with the Vučedolians, their everyday life and dilemmas. The goal of the creative team is use the identification of the visitors with the prehistorical civilisation to sensibilise them towards contemporary social and ecological issues, such as sustainable resource management and social cohesion.

3) Resilience

In 2020, the first year of the project all festival events (including Ördögkatlan festival) had to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although events could be held in 2021, there was constant uncertainty regarding the organisation of the events. The hardships of the pandemic situation are expected to continue in the near future. Therefore the creative team had to develop cultural products which can be presented in a flexible way, in many context and which are available online as well. Although the theatre game and the festival game was presented at selected festivals, the organisers intend to make these cultural products (descriptions, game rules etc.) available to the wider public after the end of the Interreg project.

The creative team intended to create programme elements which are contributing to a complex game experience. Although both games can be played separately, they represent two scales of the same civilisation; the board game is reflecting on the long-term development strategies of a village, whereas the theatre game is dealing with a personal and existential dilemma inside one village. In the festival game 2700 BC four villages (groups) are developing their environment, technology and creating their own supernatural world. The game is led and narrated by two gamemasters, its duration is approximately three hours The goal of the game is to collect as many “artefacts” as possible, thus making their village the most developed one in

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the Vučedol civilisation. Various groups of artefacts are related to different aspects of the community – trade, religion, society, military – so, the gamemasters announce at the end more “winners”. The precondition for social and technological are resources, which can be extracted, produced and traded between the villages in each round. Since the quantity of some resources – such as wood and bronze – is limited, the teams have cooperate with each other and make mutually beneficial trade deals. Although the teams are competing to get the most artefacts, the scarcity in some resources impose their cooperation. There is a common goal of sustainability for the all temas defined at the beginning; at the end of the last round a minimal quantity of houses has to be reached, but the forest cut down should not exceed a certain value. The fact that the teams have to cooperate and compete at the same time is generating many interactions inside of a “village” and between the groups as well.

The theatre game “Return to Vučedol” is using methods of participatory theatre and theatre pedagogy. The duration of the play is around 1.5 hours and is conducted by three professional actors and drama pedagogues. The participants can choose between two levels of engagement: “spectators” can only watch the play and give their opinion about the conflict unfolding. Those who are keen to interact more are invited to be “players” and participate at a training an hour before the official start of the game. Players get their own persona on a knowledge and some foreknowledge about social relations in the village. At the beginning of the play, both participants and players are welcomed by a contemporary archaeologist, Miro, who tells about the importance of Vučedol culture and leads the public to a bonfire. Around the bonfire Miro performs a rite together with the public, which brings them all back to the prehistoric times. The players and spectators find themselves on a bronze age village assembly lead by the village Shaman. In the following course of the play a personal conflict between village residents is unfolding and a related existential question related to the community is raised. The participants are encouraged to take part in the discussion, which is tackling current issues such as climate change, migration and shared identity.

Being realised in a cooperation of artists, pedagogues and gamemasters, the narrative of the theatre game and the board game, as well as the tools used had to be based on archaeological evidence. Therefore both games are finished with a brief discussion of an archaeologist, who is discussing the Vučedol culture and answers the questions of the public. Archaeological

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authenticity of graphic materials, tools and theatrical props was also one of the main aspects,, which was constantly taken into account during game design; the creative team constantly consulted with experts from Janus Pannonius Museum in Pécs, as well as Vučedol Culture Museum. To provide a wider archaeological context for the two games, other touristical products – a digital map as well as replicas of the prehistorical artefacts – were exhibited at the venues.

During the design of the above mentioned cultural products members of the creative team used various techniques to make the games more immersive. One such technique is involving all the visitor's senses – using sounds, smells, touch the surface of objects etc. To fulfill these requirements both games were using the “prehistorical music” composed by Ljubomir Nikolić – featuring the sounds of nature, reconstructed (musical) instruments and modern electronic music (BAŠTIĆ 2020). Organisers were using replicas of Vučedol artefacts as well as various materials, crops, tools to provide a “hands-on” experience. The biggest part of the theatre game is taking place around a village bonfire, for which organisers use scented plants. Another way to “bring back” visitors to the bronze age is *magic*; to be more precise: magical rituals. In the case of the theatre performance they are performed by the actors (lead by the shaman), involving participants in chanting, making moves etc. During the festival game, the players decide on the beliefs of their village; they are free to express in what they believe and how they establish a connection to the supranatural world. Performing of these rituals give the players collective benefits and they move forward the narrative of the game. Another way to immerse visitors into the prehistorical past is to establish interactions between as many players as possible. These interactions are taking place both between visitors and facilitators but also between visitors and are generated by the unfolding story of the theatre game and the narrative read between the rounds of the board game.

4. Connecting Communities with the(ir) Past – Experiences from Ördögkatlan Festival

On the following pages we will evaluate experiences of the projekt at Ördögkatlan Festival, taking place between the 2nd and the 6th of August 2021. This cultural event was organised after a year of a forced break caused by the pandemic. The events of the project took place in the village Beremend, situated 2 km from the Croatian border. All project events were happening in the village centre around a courtyard, which served as some kind of a “base” for

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all contents related to Vučedol culture with an information desk waiting for visitors all day long. Our first question is related to the *visibility* of the Vučedol culture in a modern festival environment. How can one catch the attention of a visitor, walking through the village, receiving strong impulses affecting all their senses – some kind of a modern *flâneur* who has a plenty of time but their attention is divided between many places and events.⁶ In the case of the project “Our Shared Heritage” the organizers needed a place which is both visible for the visitors but can be isolated during the games. Therefore Beremend had been chosen as the project venue. This village offers programmes for families and children and is seen as a rather quiet part of the festival. The courtyard of the “Pilgrim’s Shelter” was a shared venue with the association Veled Kerek, which offered various activities, games, concerts for children. Besides the courtyard, a neighbouring park and the top of a hill was used as the “stage” of the theatre game.

During the festival the project could profit from its separated but central venue and attract visitors. Due to the previously analysed lack of information on prehistory in general and the Vučedol culture in particular the organisers decided to advertise the event directly to lovers of theatre and theatrical improvisation, as well as to people who like to play board games and *LARP-s (live-action role-playing)*. This advertising strategy proved to be successful and had been amplified by the theatre-centric characteristics of the festival and the good cooperation with Veled Kerek children’s association. On the basis of the feedback one can differentiate between three types of motives of players wanting to participate. Several people were interested in social and theatre games in general, for whom Vučedol culture was an interesting (even exotic) setting. Other people had already heard of this prehistorical civilisation or took part at some other activities of “Our Shared Heritage” or the predeceasing project “Journey to the Beginnings”. A third, numerous group is made up of children from the age of twelve who were already taking part at the numerous programmes of the venue, and there they learned about the possibility of taking in the games. Children typically played alongside their parents. In some cases two or three generations took part at the games. Another recurring pattern were children returning to play another day.

⁶ On the commodification of the culture on festivals see SHEPHERD 2002.



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The organisers intended to constitute the widest possible range of programs and to offer a whole-day entertainment for the visitors. The three main cultural products were the two games and a Vučedol-themed treasure-hunt. The overall duration of these main programmes reached approximately six hours and presented various aspects of Vučedol culture. An important goal of the presence of the project at the festival was to draw the visitor's attention to the touristic destinations related to the prehistorical civilisation; Vučedol Culture Museum in Vukovar and Janus Pannonius Museum in Pécs. These institutions presented their related exhibitions as well. Besides positive feedbacks the organisers received constructive criticism related the lengthy game "2700 B.C." which can be eventually "scaled down" in the future; as a board game (for which no gamemaster would be needed), or make a shorter version of the festival game.

Conclusion

The project "Our Shared Heritage" can be characterised as international and multidisciplinary touristic cooperation with the goal of evaluating prehistorical archaeological heritage. A major challenge during the creation of the trilingual cultural products has been the informational asymmetry between the Croatian and the Hungarian public, which has been equalised by the *gamification* practices used. Another important distinctive feature of the cultural products is their presentation and location. Unlike *in situ* community archaeology or museum pedagogy the organisers had to create a "bronze age ambience" at a festival environment. The creative team tried to overcome this hardships by presenting a recognisable visual identity and a spectacular venue for the events. Also, they had to establish a close connections with people interested in specific forms of cultural tourism: theatre and LARP enthusiasts. By popularising the games among these groups and involving them in the testing process the organisers had to chance to establish a cooperation with an enthusiastic and very helpful public. Besides helping to improve the products, the "subcultural" communities contributed to the "mainstream" popularisation of the project.

Finally one has to stress the fact that the project (and such projects in general) should be seen as a sequel of a longer strategy of multidisciplinary endeavours to foster tourism in the Hungarian-Croatian cross-border area. The reputation of the Vučedol culture gained during the above analysed two-years period can and should be used for future projects on both sides of the border. Also, we have to stress the importance of the Vučedol Culture Museum in providing

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institutional and scientific support for the realisation of the projects. Other project partners can add new aspects and new contents to the touristic offers created. This kind of a cooperation can significantly contribute to (but cannot completely replace) the long-time strategic planning and branding processes of a museum as a complex academic-touristic institution.

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